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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 + + +

Volume two = The Penitent Christian

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

On Giving Edification to the Wicked

*“And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.” Luke 18:43.*

Christ, the Son of God, knew well what was to happen to him, in a short time in the city of Jerusalem, amongst the wicked Jews for he had foretold it to his disciples. Why, then, did he not remain away? Why did he make such haste to go to Jerusalem? So great was his love for all men, and his desire to save them from hell by dying a painful and disgraceful death, that while he was on the way to Jericho, he converted a great number, and impelled them to praise God, by miraculously giving sight to a blind man: “And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.” Here again, we have a pattern and example of the use we should make of those bad companions and occasions of sin that our state of life does not permit us to avoid. Almighty God makes use of his dealings with sinners to further his own honor and glory, and we, too, should use our intercourse with them for the good of our souls. Now I say further

I. *That, since God makes use of his dealings with sinners for their conversion and amendment, so too, in our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked,*

II. *We should do our best to edify others and give them good example.*

I. In unavoidable associations and intercourse with the wicked we must seek, not merely the advantage of our own souls, but we must also endeavor, as far as we can, to convert others and bring them to God. Such is the obligation incumbent on every Christian, no matter what may be his state, occupation, or condition; and it is an obligation that specially binds people in certain states of life. For example, tell me, whose duty is it to keep in order, and chastise a disobedient, dissolute, drunken, and wicked son? Who is bound to undertake that task, if not his own father? If a vain young girl spends her time in idleness, sitting at the window or standing at the door in order to see the passers-by and be seen by them; if she sleeps till late in the day, and hardly knows how to do anything but trick herself out in the latest fashion; if she is far too familiar with persons of the opposite sex, and prefers frequenting balls and parties, taking part in amusements, paying visits, and spending her time in dancing and amusing herself, to hearing the word of God in sermons and going often to the Sacraments; who is bound to instruct her, to make her give up those vanities, to keep her at home, and to occupy her with some work suited

to her condition, if not her mother? And if the mother neglects to perform this duty, who is bound to correct and to punish both, if not the father, again? But, alas, where is this zeal for souls to be found in the proper measure? They who should correct others are sometimes the very ones to give them bad example. The father, who should correct his drunken son, is himself addicted to drink; the mother, who should reprove her vain daughter, goes with her to balls and parties, is just as eager in following the fashions, and leads just as idle a life as herself.

There is no one in the world that God has not obliged in some way or other to look after his neighbor's salvation: "And he gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor" (Ecclus. 17:12). How is that? Because there is no one in the world who is not bound by the precept of Christian charity to help his neighbor when he can. From this springs the general obligation, binding on all, of assisting the poor and needy according to one's means. Now, if the law of charity binds every one to show mercy and charity to the poor in their temporal wants, how much more does not the same law oblige each one to show mercy and compassion to sinners in their spiritual necessities! And if we cannot, without sinning against the law of charity towards God and our neighbor, refuse to help him who is in want in those things that concern his body and this mortal life, can we be said to satisfy the requirements of that law, if, by our carelessness or indifference, we allow the immortal souls of our brethren, purchased so dearly by the precious blood of Christ, to go to ruin?

"My brethren," says the apostle St. James, in his Epistle, "if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him, he must know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death" (Jas. 5:19, 20). Amongst the sinners and wicked people with whom we have daily to associate, says St. Augustine, there are many who, as God foresees, will be in the number of the elect, provided we help them to be converted; while, if that help and zeal on our part be wanting to them, they will be lost forever. Now we do not know who those sinners are; for the elect and the reprobate, are so mixed up together in this life, that we cannot distinguish one from the other. Hence, then, our charity must be general, and our zeal for souls, as far as possible, universal. St. Paul frequently warned the faithful to give a good example to the heathens and idolaters with whom they had to live; and he praises the Corinthians for having done much good in that way: "Your emulation hath provoked very many" (2 Cor. 9:2). The Apostle himself, before giving those exhortations to the faithful, taught them by his own example; for after his conversion, hardly had he refreshed his body, worn out by a three days' fast, than he began to work for the conversion of the Jews and other sinners: And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). Our Lord himself gave a similar exhortation to St. Peter, when he said to him: "And thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). And his royal ancestor, David, after having repented of the crimes of murder and adultery, declared his zealous resolution to bring back to the right path those who like himself had strayed from it: "I will teach the unjust thy ways; and the wicked shall be converted to thee" (Ps. 1:15). The law of charity in fact, my brethren, binds us all to deter our neighbor from evil and to encourage him to do good.

II. More especially are we bound by our good conduct and edifying lives to give a holy example, so that the wicked with whom we may have to associate may find therein a cause of salutary confusion, to impel them to speedy repentance. For this reason, St. Paul writes to his disciple Titus: "Speak thou the things that become sound doctrine: that the aged men be sober;... the aged women in like manner, in holy attire;... young men in like manner exhort that they be sober... These things speak, and exhort and rebuke with all authority" (Tit. 2:1, 2, 3, 6, 15). But above all, "in all things show thyself an example of good works, in doctrine, in integrity, in gravity, ... that he who is on the contrary part may be afraid, having no evil to say of us" (Ibid. 7,8). Such, too, is the advice given by St. Peter to the pious: "Having your conversation good among the gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by the good works which they shall behold in you glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). This doctrine they learned from the lips of their Master Jesus Christ, who had said to them, "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

But how am I to understand this? In many other parts of the Gospel, Christ commands me to do quite the contrary, namely, to conceal my good works from the eyes of men. "Take heed that you do not your justice before men to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:1). Is there not an evident contradiction here? No. To do good solely for the purpose of being seen by others and praised by them is the vainglory that Christ condemns in hypocrites; to do good and lead a pious life, so as to be seen by men, not for the sake of gaining honor and praise, but to further the honor and glory of God; to do good,

even in public, for the advantage of our neighbor, that he may be edified and encouraged to do good also, that is not only lawful, but praiseworthy and meritorious, and in many cases a matter of strict duty.

Thus the father of a family acts very well and according to the requirements of Christian charity who says or thinks to himself I will go often and with all possible devotion to confession and holy Communion; I will never neglect to hear a sermon on Sundays and holy-days. All this, I will do publicly, so that my children, servants, neighbors, and other people of the same condition as myself may be induced to serve God in the same manner. In the morning I will kneel down and say my morning prayers; in the evening, before retiring to rest, I will assemble the whole household and will make the examen of conscience and say evening prayers. If poor beggars come to the door, I will give them alms with my own hands, so that all in the house may be edified and encouraged to perform similar acts of devotion and charity. Thus, too, the mistress of a household acts very well and in accordance with the law of the love of God and of our neighbor, when she thinks or says: I will dress modestly and in a Christian manner, and will not hesitate to appear thus dressed in public, although I should be the only one to do so; for my example may be the means of inducing others of my condition to imitate me. I will keep my daughter at home in seclusion, teach her to keep house and to do other work suited to her condition, and not allow her to frequent parties, so that others, like me, may be encouraged to do as I do, and to unite with me in procuring the honor and glory of our heavenly Father. Oh, what wonderful changes might be brought about in the world by such edifying example!

St. Gregory says that in certain circumstances one may even praise himself, his good works, his virtues, and his mode of life, if he does it with a proper end in view, that is, for the honor and glory of God and to encourage other men to follow his good example. Many holy servants of God praised themselves in that way. Job, otherwise so humble, boasts before the whole world: "I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor" (Job 29:15, 16); that is, I helped all, and assisted them in their corporal and spiritual necessities, as well as I could. Does not the great St. Paul relate in detail to the Corinthians the labors he underwent, the good works he performed? "They are the ministers of Christ; I am more; in many more labors, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often" (2 Cor.11:23). Nay, he proposes himself as an example for their imitation: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor.11:1).

Therefore a mother need make no scruple of her seeming self-praise, when she says to her daughters, although they may be already married: When I was your age, I was much more modest than you are; I did not even dream of going out to parties as you do, of dressing in the latest fashion, of spending my time idly at the window, or in unnecessary visits. My parents (may God and they be thanked for it!) brought me up much better; why do you not imitate me? Why do you not bring up your children in the same manner? Nor need any one make a scruple of saying in company: God be praised, I am not aware that a farthing of unjust gain ever came into my hands; or that, through human respect, I ever said a word more or less than what my duty required; or that I ever encouraged any one to drink more than was good for him I do not allow card-parties to meet at my house, nor permit my wife or daughters to dress too extravagantly; no one in my house would dare to appear at nightly gatherings. In a word, when one has a good object in view, it is not only praiseworthy and meritorious to show that one practices good works, especially, when they are commanded by the law of God, but it is even necessary and a matter of duty to do so. For, if it is our bounden duty, according to the law of Christian charity and mercy, to give good advice, what better advice can there be than good example, given for the praiseworthy motives I have mentioned? "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." Mark how Christ compares good example to a light. And why? A lighted candle sheds its rays on all sides of it but see where the flame points to; it always points to heaven. Such, too, should be the nature of the good example we give; it must shine on all sides and be seen by all men; but our intention must be directed to heaven, to God, in order to seek his honor alone and the spiritual good of others.

Now, if the law of charity towards all men obliges us to give good example to our associates in order to induce sinners to amend their lives, how much more are we not bound to avoid doing anything, even if we imagine it to be lawful, which could encourage the wicked in their practices, or be an occasion of sin to the innocent!

Hear what St. Paul says: "If meat scandalizes my brother, I will never eat flesh, lest I should scandalize my brother" (1 Cor. 8:13). Speaking of these words, St. Ambrose says: "So much regard should we have for the law of charity, that we should consider lawful things as unlawful, lest they might be a source of sin to others." There are, namely, many things lawful and decent in themselves; But! But! What is the meaning of that *but*? For in-

stance, conversation or intimacy with this or that person may be lawful in itself, so that not the least evil is done, even in thought but if it occurs too often, it furnishes, the neighbors or servants with matter for a reasonable suspicion of evil. A young girl dresses above her means; she has to work hard during the week in order to be able to appear in the newest fashions on Sundays and holy-days; of course, there is nothing wrong in all this; but what ideas does it not put into people's heads about her! Nor have they unreasonable grounds for their suspicions. A woman dresses like others of her standing, according to the vain fashions of the world, but, as she imagines, she does not transgress the bounds of decorum; she takes part in all amusements and is fond of going to parties; all that is lawful enough, according to her ideas; but by the apparently lawful customs she follows, she helps to keep up abuses that are not lawful. In these, and similar circumstances, Christian charity obliges us, when we can do so without suffering any great loss, to give up that conversation, that intimacy, that extravagance in dress, that worldly custom, in order not to scandalize others.

And what conclusion am I to draw from all this? If Christian charity requires us to avoid what is lawful in itself, lest we should give occasion of sin to others, how terribly they sin, who try to propagate wickedness by word and example, by advice and instruction, by approval and instigation, thus leading others into sin! St. John Chrysostom calls such people "agents and representatives of the devil, murderers of souls, and betrayers of the Blood of Jesus Christ." "Woe" cries our Lord: "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh" (Matt. 8:7). They who know themselves to be guilty in this respect, are, above all other men, under a special obligation of doing all they can for the future in word and deed to help convert the wicked, so as to gain for God either the souls they have perverted, or, if that is impossible, the souls of others, in order to make good the loss they have occasioned the almighty God. When Octavius Augustus heard of the slaughter of his three best legions, which was caused by the negligence of Quintilius Varus, he cried out, full of indignation, "Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!" So will God cry out to those people in a terrible voice from his judgment-seat: Give me back the souls you took from me! Restore to me the souls that you have stolen from me by giving them scandal!

My dear brethren, I trust that none of us are guilty in this way. If we are obliged to go into the company of the wicked, let us make use of our intercourse with them according to the law of Christian charity, and in the manner in which God makes use of his patience in bearing with sinners; that is, not only for the good of our own souls, but also for the good of the souls of others. Most of that good will be the work of our edifying example and none of us, no matter what is his state or condition, can reasonably excuse himself from the performance of this duty. If we have no other means at hand to help in the conversion of the wicked, let us, at all events, recommend them to the mercy of God by fervent prayer, so that they and we may be kept from grievous sin, or, if they have already fallen, that they may do penance at once, and that we may help each other to persevere in good to the end of our lives, until we shall meet in the society of the elect in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

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