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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 4 - THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

Shrovetide

*"He shall be delivered to the Gentiles."* Luke 18:32.

If there is any time in the year at which insult is offered to our Lord by sinners, at which Christians deliver up their Redeemer again to be mocked at by heathens and to be ill-treated by them, it is during these few days before Ash Wednesday. Generally speaking, people imagine, or, at least, act as if they believed it to be true, that everything is allowed during this time, dissipation, drunkenness, impurity, dangerous and heathenish amusements and balls are mere recreations that are perfectly lawful during Shrovetide. Permit me to disabuse you of this false idea, and to show that no more liberty is allowed to do evil, or to place the soul in danger of sin now, than at any other time.

*No more liberty is allowed in unlawful things at Shrovetide, than at any other time. He who speaks and acts contrary to this, delivers up Jesus Christ to the Gentiles to be mocked.*

If really more freedom were allowed in these days than at other times, the cause must be either from some change in God, who does not wish us to serve him now the same as at other times, or from some change in our state of life and religion which does not require such great holiness of life from us at this time, or else from some change in our own souls, which at this season have a business to attend to that is far different from the business of their salvation. But none of these suppositions are correct, and, therefore, this part of the year should not differ from the other parts as far as the service of God is concerned.

1. Is not God the same now as he was at Christmas-time? Was he better, holier, wiser, or juster a few months ago than he is today? Is he worthy of less honor, fear, and love? Has he in this season given free leave to commit all kinds of vices? Does he hate and condemn sin less now than formerly? How is it that this season has the privilege of allowing what is forbidden at other times? It is an article of faith that the world and its usages are at enmity with the service of God; could there be any time, then, in which worldly pleasures might be indulged in without restraint, and when people are allowed to forget God, to serve the world, and to follow its corrupt usages? Oh, no; God is always the unchangeable Lord, who says of himself: "I am the Lord, and I change not" (Malach. 3:6).

He is still the same most perfect God, who deserves our love during Shrovetide as well as during Lent; the same infinite, omnipresent God, who must be honored in all places over the whole world; the same eternal God, who must be served at all times; the same jealous God, who cannot allow any one to share our hearts with him, nor permit himself to be defrauded of a moment of time; the same God of infinite holiness, who must hate and detest sin always. "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike" (Wisd. 14:9). He still remains the same most just God, who can allow no wickedness to go unpunished, and who cannot give to any one a single moment in which he may lawfully sin. "He hath given no man license to sin" (Eccles. 15:21). He remains the same provident God, who has never promised his help and grace to those who expose themselves to danger without necessity; nay, he assures us, on his own word, that he will abandon such presumptuous men to their own weakness, and will let them perish in the danger; for his threats and warnings hold good at Shrove-tide, as well as at any other time. "Give not place to the devil" (Ephes. 4:27). "Woe to that man by whom scandal cometh" (Matth. 18:7), that is, by whom others are placed in the dangerous occasion of doing, speaking, or thinking evil. The warning of Christ holds good at all times: "And, take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness" (Luke 21:34). So also with the words: "What I say to you, I say to all: Watch" (Mark 13:37). Be careful; close the gates of your senses, that death may not enter your souls. It always remains true that: "He that loveth danger shall perish in it" (Eccl. 3:27). And what the Apostle says of those sins that are generally committed at Shrovetide is always true also: "They who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God" (Galat. 5:21).

2. Therefore it is not allowed to lead a more careless, dissipated life at this season than at any other, as far as God is concerned; and if you say to the contrary, you belong to the rabble who delivered up Jesus to the scorn of the Gentiles, and you act most unjustly toward your Supreme Lord if you take anything away, during these days, from the love and service you owe him. Do you think that a whole lifetime would be too much for the service of God? Would it be too much for a God who has loved you from all eternity, and will love you for all eternity; for a God who in human form gave up His whole life for your salvation? Ah, if you had a hundred thousand lives, they would not be enough to make a full return for His love! Therefore: "Fear the Lord thy God" (Levit. 19:32), at all times.

It is Shrovetide, you say; but I suppose you remain a reasoning being at Shrovetide. You are still a Catholic, and make profession of the law, faith, and religion of Jesus Christ. Is not that so? For you certainly do not wish to deny your faith, nor, if it were possible, to blot out the baptismal character from your soul. Now, it is an incontestable truth that every one is bound at all times to act as he knows his state and duty require, for every one who makes profession of any state is bound to act as becomes that state. This doctrine is admitted even in the perverse world, which teaches that all should behave in a manner suitable to their birth, station, and occupation.

Now, I ask, is Christianity an empty imagination? Is that protestation that we have made in Baptism to renounce the devil, the flesh, and the world, with its vain practices, a mere fable? Can there be any time in the year at which it is permitted to act in a manner unbecoming the name of Christian, and to dishonor the dignity of our state? What is a Christian? He is one who has a special relationship to God, his heavenly Father; what Jesus is by nature, the Christian is by adoption; he receives by baptismal regeneration what Jesus received by birth. The Apostle St. Paul says: "You have received the spirit of the adoption of sons, whereby we cry: "Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15). St. John says: "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). What is a Christian? He is one who belongs to God the Holy Ghost, whose dwelling-place he is. "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16.)

Can any greater dignity be imagined than to be a child of God, a brother of Jesus Christ and the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost? What is the profession and duty of a Christian? His name of child of God shows clearly enough what reverence and love he ought to have for his heavenly Father at all times and in all places. If he is a member of Christ, he must represent in his own person the life of his humble, thorn-crowned Head. If he is a temple of God, he must keep himself in purity and holiness as a vessel consecrated to God: "For the temple of God is holy; which you are" (1 Cor. 3:17).

See, then, if you can reconcile the holiness and nobility of your state with the vanities and dissipations of the world, the promises you made in Baptism and the duties of your holy state with the many sins and follies that are generally committed at this season.

3. Finally, we have an immortal soul, and if it suffers injury, what good would it do us to have had all the pleasures of the world during Shrovetide? We have also an implacable enemy, who is always lying in wait for us, and who spies out every moment for a chance of ruining us. Perhaps the devil is asleep during Shrovetide? Or he is weaker and not so well able to tempt us, or else is our nature stronger and better able to resist him, when we leave every door and window open to him, than at other times, when we often have enough to do, even in church and during prayer, to resist him? We have also death to fear during Shrovetide; an uncertain death that may happen at this time as well as at any other; a terrible death that will at once launch us into a long eternity. Are we now, perchance, better protected against the countless unforeseen accidents that may cut short the thread of life at any moment? Are we better prepared to make the long journey into eternity, if our time should come when we are in the midst of sinful indulgence? We have also God's judgments to expect, and he will demand a strict account of every idle word, nay, even our good deeds will be scrutinized. Will nothing of what we do during Shrovetide appear in that judgment? We have a heaven to hope for, and a hell to avoid. Is that fire extinguished in which sinners are to burn, or will it ever be extinguished? Is that kingdom destroyed in which the just are to reign, or is it worth so little now that we need not trouble ourselves about it? If we gain heaven during these days, shall we be less happy than if we gained it at another time? If we go to hell during Shrovetide, shall we be less miserable and unhappy than at another time?

But, they say, that is too severe! Must we always remain at home and give way to melancholy? Lent is coming on; we must enjoy ourselves now; if something occasionally slips in that is not all right we can make it good during Lent; in a few days more we shall have time enough to atone for it all. But what a wretched excuse that is! Because we must watch over ourselves a little more carefully and restrain our senses in a few days, ought we, therefore, now to allow ourselves every liberty? We shall soon weep for our sin; must we now collect material for our tears, in order to atone for them? The Catholic Church will soon forbid us flesh-meat; ought we, therefore, now to indulge in carnal pleasures? Bye-and-bye we shall be exhorted to self-denial; must we, therefore, now drown our reason in drunken excess? Penance shall then be preached to us; let us now act so as to leave something to repent of. We must go to confession at Easter; let us now do something that will give us matter for confession. What wicked talk that is! We must enjoy ourselves! Why must? What necessity is there for it? Oh, Lent is coming on. But is Lent, then, so terrible? You seem to think that it is like going into another world, where you will never see each other again! What is your idea of Lent? Do you intend to leave the world and bury yourselves in a monastery, or hide away in a cave in the desert? Will you have to suffer hunger and thirst, and to macerate your bodies by vigils and disciplines? I do not think that the spirit of penance will lead you so far. Perhaps the ashes that will be placed on your foreheads on Ash Wednesday require that you should now enjoy yourselves, as a necessary preparation? No, you say. What then? Oh, we must fast, unless we have a dispensation, and abstain from the use of flesh-meat. Yet there are many who would be overjoyed to have on Easter Sunday the food that others have during Lent, although it is not flesh-meat. Ah, how many there are who have not always bread enough to eat! They must abstain every day; their fast lasts through the year; they can never amuse themselves, and yet God keeps them in health and strength. But we must amuse ourselves; we cannot do without it! What folly to imagine that! We have reason to do penance our whole lives long; we must work out our salvation in fear and trembling; as long as the present time lasts, we are not sure of heaven. It is not those who now laugh whom Christ calls blessed, but those who now weep. And we have cause enough for weeping every hour and moment; our past sins, even if we had committed only one, the constant danger of sin, the uncertainty of dying a happy death and going to heaven and escaping the pains of hell, all these things should excite us to constant watchfulness, and to childlike fear, humility and modesty.

Yes, lest I should be too strict in this matter, I grant that you, too, should amuse yourselves at Shrovetide, but in a lawful and Christian manner. Amuse yourselves, then, but with a good and holy intention for the honor and glory of God. Examine for a moment all the amusements of Shrovetide, and place the good intention before them, to see how they will harmonize with it. For instance, I will drink to excess, for the honor and glory of God; I will enjoy myself this evening with this or that person in an unlawful manner, for the honor and glory of God; I will spend the night dancing, disguised, and dressed immodestly, for the glory of God and in union with

the bitter Passion and death of Jesus Christ, that God may be more pleased with what I do, and may be more honored by it. Is this consistent? Is it not rather making a mockery of God? Enjoy yourselves, but like children of God, who keep their Father always before their eyes and in their hearts; enjoy yourselves, but without sin, without danger to your souls.

I turn to you, beloved, pious, and Christian brethren who are here present, and I ask you in the words of our Lord, which he addressed to his Apostles, after many had abandoned him: “Will you also go away?” (John 6:68.) My beloved disciples, you alone are with me, all the others have left me; will you follow their bad example and leave me also? My dear Christians, I ask you the same question; will you join the impious rabble who during this season offends God by unlawful pleasures, or will you not rather remain faithful to God, like the twelve Apostles, like all good and pious Christians? True friendship shows itself at all times, and especially when the beloved one is abandoned and in distress. What a joy it will be for the Angels if you try to atone in some degree, by worthy confession and communion, by frequently visiting the Blessed Sacrament when it is exposed, by fervent prayer and by pious lives, for the insults that so many offer to their Creator during this time! You would be like Tobias, of whom the Scripture says: “When all went to the golden calves he alone fled the company of all, and went to Jerusalem to the temple of the Lord, and there adored the Lord God of Israel” (Tob.1:5). Amen.

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