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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 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

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

### The Eternal Fire of Hell

*"For he shall be delivered to the gentiles."* Saint Luke 18:32.

Woe to you and me if we do not atone by timely repentance for our many sins! For if an angry God delivered up his only Son into the hands of the Gentiles to be put to death for the sins of others, how will it be with us if we fall into the hands of an avenging God on the day of judgment, if the sentence on us shall be, "Depart, you cursed"? Then shall we, too, be delivered, and to whom, and for what purpose? To the torturers? "Into everlasting fire!" Here is food for thought. Fire! Eternal fire! Loss of heaven; separation from God; the gnawing worm of conscience; mad rage and fury against one's companions; mad howlings and curses and blasphemies of the damned; intolerable stench; hunger and thirst; torments without alleviation, comfort, or hope! Fire! Eternal fire! We think so seldom of this; and yet if we reflected on it as frequently as we should, eternal fire would not be the lot of so many. We shall consider this subject today, according to the warning of the Holy Ghost: "Let them go down alive into hell" (Ps. 54:16); go down in thought into hell during life, that you may not have to go there after death.

I. The wicked shall be condemned to fire.

II. They shall be condemned to eternal fire.

I. Of all the elements, the most active and penetrating is fire; of all torments, the worst and most intolerable is that caused by fire. The hardest stones and metals, steel and iron, brass and copper, silver and gold, are melted by the heat of fire, and made like a flowing stream. To be burnt alive, singed with burning torches, torn with red-hot pincers, and roasted on burning coals were the worst tortures inflicted either by criminal judges on offenders, or by tyrants on the martyrs of Christ, who gave their blood for the faith.

If one happens to burn the outer skin of the finger it is recommended to hold the affected part to the fire to draw the heat out. The remedy is an assured one; but did any of you ever try it to see how painful it is? Oh, how the poor patient screams and bites his lips, and how often he draws his finger away! Yet the flesh is not even in the fire, which merely sends the heat out to it. How would it be if the finger had to be kept in the fire or on a burning coal for the space of one or two minutes? Truly there is many a one who would rather cut the finger off altogether than bear such torture.

All the fire we have ever seen or could see on earth is only a thin smoke in comparison with the intensity and activity of the fire of hell. The fiery rain that an angry God poured down from heaven on the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrha; that furnace in Babylon, of which the flames rose to the height of forty-nine cubits; all

these things are nothing compared to hell. The holy martyr, St. Lawrence, jested with his executioners as he lay on the gridiron for a few hours at the farthest; others sang joyful melodies in the midst of the flames. So little did they think of earthly fire, if they could only escape the far more terrible fire of hell, in which there is no singing or laughing, but only howling, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

The reason of this is evident; for all our fire on earth is only a natural element, which can work and torture only according to its ordinary natural strength, and can burn nothing but material bodies. The fire of hell, on the other hand, is an element raised miraculously above its natural powers, so that it burns and tortures not merely bodies, but also souls and pure spirits. Our earthly fire after a short time deadens sensibility and consumes the body to ashes, but the fire of hell has received from the Creator the peculiar property of devouring and at the same time preserving what it devours, of tormenting and yet never destroying what it tortures, of burning and yet never consuming what it burns. Our fire is kindled by weak creatures; the infernal fire by the Almighty God. "I...will refine them as silver is refined" (Zacharias 13:9). Thus we may see that the divine omnipotence is the soul of this fire; it lights it, fans it, and excites it to the highest pitch.

Now, if our earthly fire can cause such pain that one may not hold his finger in the flame of a wax candle for one minute, who of us shall be able to dwell in the midst of the raging flames of hell, compared to which all our fire is but a shadow? And yet the reprobate man shall be buried in this flame; that is, he shall be covered and surrounded with it on all sides, and shall have to remain so for all eternity. Holy Writ always represents this fire to us by most terrible pictures, and by the awful effects it produces; it is a place where a fiery shower falls from above like a stream on the damned, and inundates them from below. It is described as a madly rushing torrent, which drowns the wicked in its foaming and raging waves. It is likened to a fierce dragon that bites, tears and devours. Our dear Saviour uses a strange mode of expression: after having exhorted us rather to cut off the hand or foot, and tear out the eye that might lead us into sin, and thus to enter blind and lame into heaven, than, having eyes, hands, and feet, to be hurled into hell, he adds these words: "For every one shall be salted with fire" (Mark 9:48). That is to say, as fish that is salted in a barrel is so completely penetrated by the salt that no part of it remains unsalted, so also they who are condemned to hell shall be tormented by fire, not merely on the outside of their bodies, but in every part of them. Oh, woe to you who are now given up to carnal sins if you do not do timely penance! You shall one day be a burning coal in this fire; that body of yours, corrupted by the filth of foul passions, shall be completely penetrated by an intolerable heat, that will pierce you through like a glowing iron; your flesh shall be roasted, the marrow in your bones melted, your brain shall boil and seethe in your head, and flames of fire shall burst forth from your mouth, and nose, and eyes, and ears. Thus shall you be in hell surrounded with fire, above and below, on the right and on the left, inside and outside.

II. It would be tolerable in some degree if it were ever to end, but it is eternal. But to live always in fire; to have a fiery house for one's dwelling; flames for one's bed and covering; never to die in that fire; never to be released from it; never to have any alleviation of one's torments, to burn forever: that is at the same time terrible and incomprehensible! Oh, truly! let hell be far hotter than the Holy Scriptures describe it; let its pains and torments be increased a thousandfold; let them last for countless millions of years; all that would be as nothing as long as the fearful "forever" is wanting. If the fire of hell would only come to an end some time or other; if I could now go to the lost souls, and say to them with truth: your torments, oh, unhappy wretches, shall indeed last for a long time, but sooner or later they shall end; I should make a heaven out of a hell, and fill it with songs of gratitude and praise, instead of curses and blasphemies. "But the hell of fire, their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished" (Mark 9:46, 47). "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire!" Let us ponder for a while on these words, and see what eternity means, and then so order our lives that we may never have to suffer in such a fire; for our fate in that respect depends on ourselves.

If long continuance makes even pleasure painful, how intolerable must not pain itself be when it lasts long? It is painful to have a bad tooth drawn; yet it is not difficult to console the patient in such a case. Have courage, you say to him; it will soon be over; the whole thing will be done in a moment, and you will have no more pain to suffer. If it took one, two, or three hours to perform the operation, who would submit to such torture? And not only is the actual suffering of a long agony intolerable to us, but the mere sight of such agony in others fills us with pity and terror. A robber or murderer is condemned to the gallows or to the sword; if the executioner bungles in his work, and keeps the poor wretch suffering a long time, how the bystanders murmur and express

their disapproval of him! If the pain of having a tooth drawn, or of dying by the rope or the sword, is rendered so acute by being lengthened that we cannot even behold it in another person without being horrified at the sight, what must be the state of one who has to live for a long time in fire? How must it be with him who has to spend not one or two hours, nor one or two days, nor one or two years, but a whole endless eternity in the terrible and most painful fire of hell?

Oh, eternity! exclaims St. Augustine; what art thou? "Say what you will of it, and you will never have said enough." Say that it includes as many millions of years as there are stars in the firmament, grains of sand on the sea-shore, leaves on the trees, drops of water in all the rivers of the world, "you will never have said enough;" when you have counted up that immense number, you are still far from the total of eternity. Why? Because all those things bear some measure and proportion; thus, so many drops make a gallon, so many gallons a cask, so many casks a stream, so many streams a great river, so many rivers a sea; and the drops, no matter how small they are, can be so increased and added to that they will make the ocean. But no time, no matter how long, has any proportion to eternity. Add millions of years to it and it will not become greater; take away millions from it and it will not grow less. Cain is now in hell for some thousands of years, but he has not lessened his eternity by a moment; he can say: I have now been burning in hell for so many thousands of years; but he cannot say: now I have one hour less to suffer. Eternity remains just as long as it was when he first entered hell.

Oh, man! where is your reason? For all the goods of the world you would not spend one quarter of an hour in a temporal fire; and for the sake of a miserable coin that you gain or keep unjustly, for a wretched, brutal pleasure, you choose the eternal fire of hell! You would rather burn forever in hell than restore the injured honor of another; than honestly disclose your sins in confession; than forgive your enemy; than abandon that person who is a proximate occasion of sin to you; rather be in hell than give up that unlawful intimacy; than remove that stumbling-block; rather be in hell forever than give up the habit of cursing and drunkenness? Where is your reason, I ask you again; or where is your faith? Do you not believe in hell? Then you need not believe in God, for one as well as the other is an article of our faith.

"Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Is. 33:14.) Can you, who cannot bear the least inconvenience, who cannot endure to hear a dog howling, a child crying, or a fly buzzing round your ears? How will you be able to hear, and at the same to feel the crackling and rattling of your bones in the lake of boiling brimstone; and that forever? You who cannot bear the approach of a poor beggar, how will you stand the intolerable stench of your body and the bodies of others burning in sulphur; and that forever? "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?" Can you, oh, woman! brought up in every comfort and luxury, who so carefully avoid all that might occasion you the slightest pain? A trifling headache or toothache seems intolerable to you; to fast and abstain for forty days seems almost an impossibility to you; an ill-fitting shoe, an ill-made bed, a dish not prepared exactly to your taste, a soup too hot or too cold, is enough to excite your anger; how will you be able to hold out on a bed of fire in hell; and that forever? "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?" Can you, oh, unchaste man! who spend day and night in seeking sensual gratification, and pass your time in a round of dissipation? Will you be able to stand that hellish oven, in which your body, penetrated through and through by fire, shall become fire itself? And that forever? "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?" Can you, oh, vain and delicate maiden! who cannot now bear the prick of a needle without screaming; who could not bear a spark of fire, or even a drop from a burning candle on those shoulders that you expose as a source of temptation and scandal to souls? How will you be able to lie on, and hide yourself, and wallow in those burning coals of hell fire, not for a day, or a month, or a year, or a hundred thousand years, but for all eternity? Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?

No; there is not one of us who can do that; not one of us who can make up his mind to it! Therefore we must do penance, and that at once, for our past sins, and amend our lives. Ah, we want no hell! no fire! no eternal fire! We are ready for any other punishment, oh, angry God! Only save us from eternal fire! Here cut, here burn, but spare us in eternity! From this moment let us renounce sin and begin to lead new lives, so that we may escape this fire, and come to thee in eternal joys.

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