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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

First Sunday of Lent

The Thoughts of the Reprobate in Hell

“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 6:2.)

When we meditated on the everlasting fire of hell, I do not doubt that many of you, on this day two weeks ago, were filled with an unusual fear, and made most earnest resolutions to do everything to escape that fire. And to those I say in the words of St. Paul: “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Now, if you wish, you can save yourselves from eternal flames. Have you sinned? Behold, now is the time to do penance and to serve God with zeal; for that is the only means of escaping hell. But if you allow this time of grace to pass by, and go into eternity without having done penance, then never for all eternity shall you be able to entertain the slightest hope of escaping the torments of hell. What are your thoughts on this matter now? If I were to address that question to some reprobate sinner in hell he would say: I am lost, and lost forever. I could have escaped hell; I could have gained the happiness of heaven. Now I should willingly escape out of hell, and be in heaven; but it is impossible, and will be eternally impossible. These are the two thoughts which cause the reprobate the greatest torture.

I. I could have been happy, and did not wish it.

II. Now I should willingly be happy, but shall not be able for all eternity.

I. To be poor and miserable through sheer necessity, which one could not foresee or avoid, is indeed a very wretched state; but to be poor and miserable through one's own fault is a source of bitter remorse, in which no consolation is to be found. Such is the case with the damned, for they might have been happy had they wished. This is the bitter thought, the agonizing remorse that tortures the lost soul on its first entry into hell, and will continue to torture it for all eternity: I was able, but was unwilling! I could easily have escaped eternal fire, but did not wish! Elect children of God! I might have been with you, but I did not wish! Priceless joys of heaven, it lay in my power to gain you, but I did not wish to have you! God of all happiness! I might have possessed you forever, but I did not wish it! I could have done all this, for who could have prevented me?

1. I cannot lay the least blame on my God, who always had the earnest wish and desire to save all mankind, without exception. This was the end He had in view in making me to his image and likeness. This is shown by the unheard-of love that forced Him, “for us men and for our salvation,” to come down from heaven, to assume our mortal nature, to live a poor, humble, and contemptible life in the eyes of the world for three and thirty years, to suffer all sorts of discomfort, hunger, thirst, ridicule and mockery, thorns and scourges, even to the

painful death of the cross; and all that to save us from hell, and to open for us the gates of heaven, that were closed by the sin of our first parents.

2. Perhaps I was not provided with the means necessary to get to heaven? Ah, no! What was said to the young man in the Gospel held good for me too. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Why have I not kept the commandments? Have I, perhaps, been ignorant of them? Have they not often been explained to me in the Christian Doctrine and in sermons? Can I say that they were too difficult for me to observe? But I should be contradicted by all the elect in heaven, who entered there before my death, amongst whom there are many who were weak and subject to evil inclinations as I was, people of every condition, age, sex, and nation, who have all been obliged to walk the same way of the divine commandments, for there is no other way of arriving at happiness. They were able to do that; why was not I? What a multitude of pious Christians lived with me, who daily gave me the benefit of their good example; who so often put me to shame, when I considered the edifying lives they were leading! They were able to do that; why was not I?

3. Was opportunity or time wanting to me to use the prescribed means in order to serve God, do good and escape hell? But what beautiful opportunities I have had! All the churches were open to me, inviting me to pray to God, to praise and bless Him. All the confessionals were at my service, exhorting me to enter, and in the spirit of repentance to lay down the burden of my sins. All the bells called to me in the morning to offer the holy Mass to God and to join in the usual devotions. All preachers had prepared themselves on Sundays and holydays for me as well as for others, to speak to our hearts, to warn us against hell, to exhort us to good, to deter us from sin, to urge us to zeal in the service of God, and to lead us to heaven. Ah, would that I had been diligent in attending to them! What beautiful exhortations and salutary doctrine I might have received from them for the good of my soul!

What a beautiful time I have had in the twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years that were given me on earth! There was not a moment of them in which, if I so willed, I might not have gained eternal glory in heaven! If I had made a good use of only the fiftieth part of the time I spent in vanity, idleness, and sin, how rich I should now be in eternity! Even in the last moment of my life, when my friends and my increasing weakness announced to me the approach of death, the merciful God was ready, if I had only been willing, to receive me again into his grace and friendship, although for the greater part of my life I had treated Him as my worst enemy. There was nothing in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that could have come between me and eternal happiness.

4. Who is to blame? I alone. Why am I not in eternal joys, like those others? Why am I now in hell? The will was wanting to me! This is the cruel memory that now tortures me and that will never cease to torment me for all eternity. The will was wanting; I did not wish to hearken to the voice of God; I closed my eyes to the light; I rejected good inspirations; I disregarded the warnings of my conscience; I willfully followed the inspirations of the devil, the allurements of wicked men, the perverse usages and customs of the world. I have wasted my precious time in sin; I have deferred repentance from day to day, until no more time was left to me.

II. Nothing is more apt to make us despair than to be always willing, and never to have the power of carrying out our wishes. Consider the state of two persons who are enamored of each other, who would willingly be always in each other's company, but are kept apart by their parents. What torments of longing they suffer night and day; how they sigh and moan and give expression to fruitless desires, knowing all the time that they have not the slightest hope of seeing their wish gratified! What, then, must be the unspeakable torment of the damned soul in hell who is filled with desire for all eternity, and for all eternity can never attain the object of his desire nor have the slightest hope of attaining it? What more miserable than always to wish for what you can never have, and always to hate what will be always with you? And such is the state of the lost soul: for all eternity he will not have what he desires, and yet for all eternity he will have to suffer what he hates. Who doubts that the lost soul would willingly be happy and be released from hell? On the one hand the clear knowledge of the eternal happiness from which he is excluded, and on the other the actual experience of infinite misery in which he is, must inspire him with the greatest desire of enjoying the one and being delivered from the other. When we mortals enter into eternity our eyes are opened for the first time, and we clearly see what we now behold only darkly by faith and cannot properly appreciate, namely, that the possession of God is our only supreme Good. Then the sinner, to his own eternal torment, shall be able to say to Himself: "Know thou, and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God" (Jer. 2:19). He will seek death and not find it for

eternity. So that there is nothing but despair, suffering without end, misery without end, fire without end!

You can easily see the lesson we should learn from this. What all the reprobate in hell are eternally wishing for and can never have, that is now in our power. What the damned did not wish for during life, alas! That is the very thing that most men on earth do not wish for, and therefore hell is daily filling with souls, two considerations that we should take deeply to heart. Of the first St. Augustine says: we receive two kinds of lives from the Creator: one here in time, the other in eternity; whether the first is to be happy or miserable rests not with us to decide; God has reserved to Himself the right of arranging all that; as to the happiness or misery of the other, it is now a matter of choice for us, and the Lord has left it to our own free will. Whether I am rich or poor, sick or well, honored or despised, in joy or in sorrow during life, depends not on me, no matter how legitimately I may work for it, or how my inclinations tend; I must wait for the providence of God to settle things for me; but whether I live in joy or misery in eternity, in heaven or in hell, that depends on myself; with the help of God's grace, I can shape my own destiny in that respect.

Now I ask: is it true, or rather is it possible, that, although we can, we do not wish to be happy, and that, too, eternally? This is what puzzled the man who was rapt up in spirit by the angel into heaven, where the indescribable joys of the elect were shown to him: Oh, my God! he exclaimed, what a happy life! Who can come to this place? Whoever wishes, answered the angel. What! replied the man, whoever wishes? And who would not wish to attain such happiness? Oh, answered the angel, many, very many, nay, the greater number of men, do not wish to have this happiness. Then he brought the man down to hell, where he saw, to his great terror and horror, the torments suffered by the damned. Alas! he asked again, who comes to this place? And again the angel answered: whoever wishes. What! is it possible for a man to be so foolish as to desire to be hurled into such a frightful den of torments? Yes; most people in the world are guilty of that folly. So it is; he who wishes shall go to heaven; that is, he who orders his life so as to receive the promised reward from God. And he who wishes shall be hurled into hell; that is, all those who do not avoid sin, or who, after having committed sin, do not do penance while they have time.

Sinner, see the folly of which you are guilty; you do not wish to be happy, and therefore you will not be so; your desire is to go to hell, and therefore hell will be your everlasting dwelling. But is it possible, I ask again, that you are so foolish and senseless? If it were in your power to order your temporal life as you wish, would you not seek to lead a life of the utmost wealth, comfort, joy, and happiness? You who think of nothing else but rest, comfort, pleasure, and self-gratification in every possible way, even in sin and vice? And yet you do not find in those things the happiness you seek in them, and you will never find it; you will never attain what you are so eager to possess. Ah, why, then, do you not wish and seek to be eternally happy in heaven? for that can you be if you will! But, oh, madness and folly! This is what you do not wish; this is what you absolutely refuse! You may tell me the contrary a thousand times, and my answer to you will be that you are not in earnest; you do not wish for heaven; you continue on in the old habits of sin; you still keep your ill-gotten goods; you refuse to give up your unlawful love, your hatred and enmity; you are as fond as ever of swearing and cursing, of drunkenness and intemperance, of pride and vanity; you put off repentance from day to day; there is no sign of amendment in you. Therefore you do not wish to be eternally happy, although you have the power of becoming so; you do not wish to go to heaven, and thus your wish is to be lost forever. One day you will have a far different wish, but for all eternity it will be impossible to fulfill it, and that will be one of your worst torments in hell. Amen.

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