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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 + + +

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN - VOL. III

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

### The Number of Those Who Really Love God Is Small.

*“He was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as snow.” St. Matthew 17:2.*

These three disciples had already been a considerable time with Jesus; they had seen his most holy and perfect life, his many miracles, and yet they never had such pleasure in his presence, such a fervent desire to be with him, as they felt on Mount Thabor, when he was transfigured before them. They lost their senses almost with joy. Oh, cried out Peter, “Lord, it is good for us to be here;” let us never leave this place; “if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.” They imagined they were already amidst the joys of heaven. But why? What did they see there? “He was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as snow.” This was a mere figure of the future beauty and glory of the humanity of Christ in heaven. My dear brethren, we are created for no other end than to know the great God, to love him with our whole hearts.

*There are few men who love Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with a sincere love; therefore there are few who are loved by Jesus Christ with a special love.*

To love a person is nothing else than to wish well to him, to be sincerely glad of his fortune, to be troubled at his misfortunes, to be pleased when he is present, and in every way possible to seek to serve him. When a love like this is returned, that is, when he whom I love loves me also, then there is friendship. Now, as there are many kinds of friendship in the world, so there are many kinds of love. Some love in outward appearance, through mere hypocrisy, and with the lips alone, while their hearts have nothing to do with it; this is not love, but flattery and falsehood, and such friends are more to be dreaded than open and declared enemies, because one cannot be on his guard against them; Some love and really mean it in their hearts, and have a true affection for the person, but only so long as they receive benefits from him; this is not an honest love; for even the most savage barbarians and heathens can be softened by presents and benefits; in this way, not the person, but his benefits are the object of the love. Others love although they have not received nor expect to receive any benefits from their friend; but they do not show this love in act when there is an opportunity of doing him a service. This is not true friendship; for he who loves sincerely, willingly shares with his friend, and would even take the bit out of his own mouth to give it to him. Others love and show their love in act; but they do not do so

constantly and with their whole hearts; they are shifting and changeable; today they love one person, tomorrow another. That is a love that has no foundation. Others love the one person with their whole hearts, but only so long as he is prosperous; in the time of need they fall away, and leave him, and are ashamed to be looked on as his friends; they have no desire to share in his misfortunes. That is a weak friendship, and the one to which the old proverb refers: "a friend in need is a friend indeed." A sincere love does not allow itself to be interfered with by suffering, misfortune, or sorrow; it sweetens all that is bitter, nor is there any hardship that it will not readily endure for the sake of the loved one. Finally, there are others who love constantly, with their whole hearts, even when their friend is in the greatest need; they are ready to share with him all they have, and to bear anything for him, even when they have no hopes of gaining any reward thereby; and that they do out of sheer affection and tenderness. This alone is true, honest love and friendship.

Such love for God is a rare thing in the world. There are lovers enough in the world; but how do they love? And they love with great fervor and earnestness; but what? Would to God that their affections were directed to God alone, who is alone worthy of all our love.

Proud Christians! to what do your love and affections, your hearts and desires tend? To Jesus the Son of God? No indeed; he is too vile in your eyes; he acts in too humble a manner for your taste! There he lies in the manger, between the ox and the ass, unknown and despised by the world, while his companions are poor shepherds. Your thoughts and ideas tend much higher than that! So that you do not love Jesus, and you renounce his friendship and company; for he cannot bear the proud, while he shows favor to the humble: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (James 4: 6). You misers, where does your love tend to? To Jesus? Far from it! Money and property, which you try to scrape together by all possible means, you will not find with him. A handful of straw on a hard block of wood is his couch; swaddling-clothes are his wardrobe, the breath of the animals his fire and hearth, a poor virgin his mother, a poor carpenter his foster-father.

But, you will say: there are very many Christians who love God; for what else are we to conclude when we see zealous, pious Christians thronging the confessionals, and before the altars in the churches, uttering those loving words: O God, I love thee; I love thee with all my strength, with my whole heart and soul, more than myself, more than everything in heaven and on earth? If there were neither heaven nor hell, I should still love thee, because thou art my God and my Saviour. Such are their sighs and their prayers. All that would indeed be very fine; if true love consisted in such things I should retract what I have said, and assert that the greater number of Catholics love God. But attend to their actions and mode of life, and you will see that generally speaking their love is but a lip service, a simulated affection, a friendship consisting in mere words, but not a love in reality. Their lives do not harmonize with their words; and the same persons who praise and bless God with their lips will soon afterwards again insult and revile him by their repeated sins; they who in the church sing and pray like Angels before the altars, when they go home, curse and swear like demons if the least thing crosses them. Is that the way to love? No, certainly, deeds are the proof of love. What sort of a love is that which consists in praising one with the lips and saying, I love you, while you actually beat him with your fists, trample him under your feet, and raise your stick at him? That is to give him a friendly kiss and at the same time hand him over to his enemies, as the traitor Judas did with our Lord. That is to greet and embrace him with one hand, while with the other you pierce his heart, as Joab did to Amasa. That is the way in which many of us love God in word only, but not in deed; and then we flatter ourselves that we are pious and devout. But love does not consist in that: "My little children," says St. John, "let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I. John 3:18). How is that to be done? Hear what Christ himself says, "If any one love me, he will keep my word" (St. John 14:23). The love of God is in the will, and it is a real conformity of our human with the divine will; so that we will what God has commanded, and avoid what he has forbidden.

When we love a person, we like to speak of him, and to hear others speak of him; our greatest pleasure is to hold a conversation with him, while the time we spend in his presence never seems too long, never wearisome. So does our Saviour love us, as we should by rights love him. "My delight," he says, "is to be with the children of men" (Prov. 8:31). But, what pleasure and joy men find in God, and in his company is shown clearly enough by the weariness they feel when God is spoken of! I allude to the little desire they have to hear sermons and Christian instructions. The sermons are too long, they should be short. Oh, what a cold love of God that shows!

When we love a person, we are rejoiced at his prosperity, and deeply afflicted when things go wrong with him. We see, and hear, and know that the God whom we say we love, is grossly insulted and offended and

mocked every day, and every hour of every day, by great and small, young and old, who sin against him; where is our sympathy, our sorrow and affliction? The little concern that we feel at the terrible offences offered to God, the coldness and indifference with which we look on while countless sins are committed every day, without moving a step to prevent them, are certainly an evident proof that we have in our hearts but a very small spark of the true love of God.

When we love a person, we rejoice to be able to suffer something for him; for, nothing is difficult to one who loves; nothing is too bitter, nothing too hard, provided he can thereby please his beloved One. Thus we read that Jacob thought nothing of the seven years during which he had to work for his beloved Rachel; they seemed but a few days because of his love (Gen. 29:20). What is our love like in this respect, my dear brethren? As long as we have nothing to suffer, as long as things go according to our wishes, and we are in good health and spirits, receiving consolations from God; when Jesus comes to us in the appearance of a bridegroom, and invites us into the garden, into the wine-cellar, as we read in the Canticle, then we are zealous and active in the service of God; then we cry out: "My heart is ready, O God; my heart is ready" (Ps. 107:2). Then we exclaim: God be praised! I am still prospering! Blessed be God! I am still in good health; glory be to God! This undertaking has succeeded with me. But if our Lord comes like a poor child; if he shows himself to us torn by the scourges, or nailed to the cross; if he asks us: "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" (St. Matthew 22:22); if we hear him calling out to us from afar, saying: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (St. Matthew 16:24), how unpleasant those words are in our ears!

True love is generous, and has nothing too precious to give the loved one. But how miserly we are towards God! If we do and avoid that to which we are bound under pain of eternal damnation, we seem to have done wonders. Is this or that a mortal sin? we ask sometimes. Oh, if not, then we can do it. But it is a venial sin, — oh, that is nothing! Who can avoid small sins? If I did this or that, if I put a stop to that abuse or that vanity, I know I should please God; but he is not so dear to me as all that. I love Jesus my Saviour; but my friendship for him does not go to such lengths; I cannot overcome myself in that particular. I will say nothing of the love of our neighbor, of generosity to the poor, of benefiting those who hate and persecute us, all duties that we would certainly perform if we loved God sincerely, for even the servants of one whom we love are of interest to us, nay, we feed our friend's dog and do not suffer it to go away hungry. And I must also pass over the carelessness we show in furthering the divine honor, although many occasions present themselves of furthering it. Nay, would to God that we were not sometimes ashamed of being pious and devout.

You see now, my dear brethren, that, if we go through all classes of men, we shall find very few who love God sincerely. And why is that? Is God so worthless that he is not deserving of love? And yet, what is there in him that does not deserve the greatest love? If we love what is beautiful, why not love God, who is infinite beauty? If we love what is good, why not God, the supreme Good? if we love him who is our benefactor, why not God, from whom we have everything? How is it that our hearts are so hard towards God? Love for us poor worms of the earth has brought him down from heaven, and laid him on a handful of straw, while our love for God cannot bring us from earth to heaven? The world, the flesh, the devil have done nothing like that for the love of us; they can only offer us miserable things, which will hurl us into the depths of hell; and yet they find lovers enough all the world over, though there is no command to love them. God has left nothing undone to win our love, has promised the kingdom of heaven to those who love him, and threatened the fire of hell to those who do not love him. And yet he can find but few lovers!

How unjust and ungrateful we are in being so hard-hearted! After having created us out of nothing, saved us from hell by his death, made us his children and heirs to the kingdom of heaven after having showered countless benefits on us, it was still necessary for him to command us to love him, for it would have been intolerable if we had not freedom to do so. Why have we not loved God sooner? And how have we ever dared to hate and provoke him to anger? Shall we not then, at once begin to love God sincerely? Late have we loved thee, O beauty ever ancient, ever new. Little have we loved thee, because we have little known thee, but henceforth we will love thee with our whole heart, with our whole soul and with our whole mind, and nothing in heaven, or on earth shall ever separate us from the love of God. Amen.

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