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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
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

The Dangers and Graces of the Unmarried State

"Lord, it is good for us to be here." Matt. 17:4.

Thus Peter said when he saw our Lord in snow-white garments, and had a foretaste of his future glory in heaven. But while Christ was speaking with Moses and Elias about his future Passion and death, Peter and the other two disciples, terrified at hearing the voice of the heavenly Father saying: "Hear ye him," fell on their faces, sore afraid. Hitherto I have described the happiness of the Religious and the unmarried states; and some of you might say with Peter: "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matt. 17:5); let us build tabernacles in the unmarried state. Yes, that is true; and would that all who are called by God to that state so understood it! But there is one thing that they must not forget, lest, like Peter, a too late repentance may fill them with dread. Each state has its own joys, which attract us to it, but each one has also its difficulties and trials, which might frighten one away. And such is especially the case with the unmarried state, the happiness of which I described in my last sermon. I do not say this, Christian sons and daughters, to give you a dislike for that state; God forbid! With St. Paul, I rather advise you to embrace it, for it is good for you to remain as you are. My intention is simply to tell you what this state is in itself, and to show you how you may remain in it constantly. I say, then —

- I. *The unmarried state is full of dangers and temptations.*
- II. *It is also full of graces and helps.*

I. "The life of man on earth is a warfare" (Job 7:1), in which we have to contend with all kinds of enemies, and in which we are always surrounded by hundreds of dangers and temptations. This holds good for all. The pious are warned to be always prepared for combat: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation" (Eccles. 2:1). But this is true of none more than of you, Christian sons and daughters, who are espoused to Jesus Christ, in the state of perpetual chastity. For, the more precious the treasure that you have to guard, the more thieves you will find who, attracted by it, will be always on the lookout to deprive you of it. You are the snow-white lambs of the flock of Christ; and on that very account you have to guard yourselves all the more carefully from the attacks of the hungry wolves, who will be attracted by your whiteness. As far as purity is concerned, you are compared to the Angels. But do not, therefore, be too confident; remember that even the Angels in heaven were not safe, and that millions of them fell, through pride, into the abyss of hell. You are the most intimate servants of Jesus Christ, who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; but for that very reason you will have many to envy you, who will try to deprive you of

your Master's favor by every means in their power. The enemies who divide their forces when attacking other souls will unite together to make common cause against you. Some souls are attacked by the devil, others by the corrupt world, and others again are fiercely combated and led into sin by their own flesh. You will not be free from any of these: the three together, the devil, the world, and the flesh, will declare war on you, without truce or intermission.

1. The devil, whom the Scripture calls the unclean spirit and the sworn foe of purity, is filled with rage when he sees young boys and girls, who are apparently the weakest, courageously opposing his suggestions, and leading a chaste life; and because he has a bitter hatred against Jesus Christ, who destroyed his kingdom, and knows that God has selected you as his spouses and keeps you for himself, therefore the wicked spirit employs all means possible to deprive you of your purity. It is he of whom the Gospel says: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man... (and you have driven him away from you by embracing the unmarried state), 'he saith: I will return into my house, whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and, entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first'" (Luke 11:24-26). Therefore, be cautious and vigilant: "Be sober and watch: because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour".

2. The other enemy who unites with the devil to hinder your holy purpose is the vain world, whose maxims, usages, and teaching are almost always opposed to the life of Jesus Christ and to the teaching of his Gospel. I mean the worldly people among whom you have to live, whose society and companionship you cannot always avoid, and who will often put temptations in your way; for they will cajole you, laugh at, flatter, and caress you; they will lead you into places, occasions, and circumstances, in which the purity of the heart is in great danger of succumbing before long. You will see many things and hear many things which will soon deprive you of your precious treasure. If they can do nothing else, they will try to make you imitate their vain and apparently not unlawful usages, by which the spirit of the world will soon find a place in your heart, and the spirit of Jesus Christ will be driven out, little by little.

3. The third, and most formidable enemy, who is with you day and night, is your own flesh, the innate carnal desire of your nature, of which St. Paul says, with fear and trembling:

"But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is, in my members" (Rom. 7:23). His meaning is: I constantly feel wicked desires that obstinately contend against the knowledge that I have, for they cannot bear to have the flesh so curbed that it can never enjoy forbidden pleasure. "Unhappy man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24.)

No doubt, Christian virgins, you have powerful enemies, against whom you must fight daily; but you have also most powerful protectors, who are always ready to fight on your side, and to gain the victory for you. I repeat that it is very difficult to keep one's purity untarnished amidst so many attacks; but the difficulty arises from the weakness of our nature, which supernatural grace can easily overcome. It is true that, in the world, you are exposed to many dangers of losing your chastity, but you must have confidence in him who encourages you by saying to you: "Have confidence, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). He who has called you to this state and given you the will to follow his call, will also enable you to fulfill what you have vowed or promised to him. The devil is an enraged dog, who can bark but cannot bite any one who does not wish to be bitten. The vain world is a decoy, that can charm and attract, but can draw no one into its net that does not wish to follow its usages. The flesh is a shameless and untamed beast; it can rise up insolently against the will and right reason, and thus trouble the spirit, but it cannot force any one to sin who does not deliberately submit to it. Yes, yes; the unmarried state is full of temptations and dangers, but it is also full of graces and helps, by which one can easily overcome them.

II. Nothing gives more concern to a bridegroom than to see strangers courting the love of the spouse whom he loves, and whose love he desires. Even an outward mark of friendliness shown to her, although it may not be dangerous, causes him pain and uneasiness; because his jealous love makes him afraid that she, whose whole heart he desires to possess, may feel an inclination for some one else. If a bridegroom is so jealous as to feel uneasy and troubled when a stranger shows his bride any mark of friendliness, because he thinks it might lessen her love for him, how much less could he suffer her to be made the object of an impure love, in his very presence? How could he look on and see violence offered to his beloved spouse without doing all in his power to

save her? He would willingly expose his own life to danger, in order to rescue his spouse from dishonor. Your Bridegroom, Christian sons and daughters, to whom you have promised perpetual chastity, love, and fidelity, is Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the Almighty God, whom nothing can withstand. He is a tender lover of chaste souls, who shed every drop of his Blood for you; he is the jealous and loving Bridegroom of your purity, in which he cannot bear to see the least spot, who wishes to have your hearts, and your whole hearts, for himself alone. Do you then think that he can look on when you are tempted and excited to unfaithfulness by his sworn enemies, without doing anything to help you? Can you imagine that he would allow that treasure, which he values so highly, and which you have resolved to keep forever through love of him, to be stolen from you by violence, and that he would not assist you in your necessity and save you from danger? Be not afraid! Let the dangers and temptations be what they will, Jesus Christ will not leave you without help. His own honor is concerned; he will not permit your purity to become the prey of robbers as long as you are not wanting in anything that your state requires of you.

And what is that? I answer: *true humility, modesty, and trustful prayer*. If you attend to these three things, you can defy all your enemies and need never fear them. Humility will drive away the devil and his inspirations; modesty will put to shame the world and the seductions of the children of the world; prayer will subdue the flesh, and keep its unruly desires in check. If you fail in any of these three things, then you will soon lose the treasure of your purity.

1. Humility is necessary to all men who wish to serve God and to save their souls. “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (I Pet. 5:5). To give us an example, he emptied himself and humbled himself even to the death of the cross; and since we publicly acknowledge a law and a Gospel, the fundamental doctrine of which is humility and self-abasement, and adore a Teacher who said: “Amen, I say to you; unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). I repeat, that if humility is necessary for all men as a means of salvation, it is absolutely necessary, above all, to those who wish to preserve their virginal purity intact. Does anyone, says St. Augustine, wish to exhort the faithful to perpetual chastity, according to the advice of St. Paul? Then he must not merely describe the excellence and dignity of virginity, so as to excite a desire for it, but also he must exhort and warn those who embrace that state not to think anything more of themselves on that account. Married people, although they do not live in a state of perfection, like virgins, if they are humble, will follow the Lamb of God better than the virgin who is proud; nay, the latter is very far, on account of her pride, from Him who says: “I am meek and humble of heart.”

If you cannot, or will not, imitate the purity of Mary, at least imitate her humility, and you will have done enough. You can be saved without virginity, but not without humility. The humble soul that laments the loss of purity can please God; but without humility, not even Mary, the Queen of virgins, could please him.

And not only does virginity without humility fail to please God, but also, if you are not humble, no matter how chaste you are, you will certainly not long remain a pure virgin. You are like a tall tree that has not deep roots, which the first storm blows down. You are like a magnificent edifice, the foundations of which are not deep enough, and are built on sand, and which the first floods will carry away. Pride is the forerunner and chief cause of unchastity; and the justice of God generally permits the proud to fall into that degrading vice, so that they may learn to know their weakness and misery, and thus become humble. St. Paul says of himself, after having described how he was rapt up to heaven and saw there wonderful things, that man may not speak of: “And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me,” to disquiet me, and torment me always, so that I might know that I am a poor mortal. Therefore, the crafty tempter, when he wishes to lead a soul into impurity, does not at once assail it with filthy temptations, for he knows well that they would have no effect on souls who fear God. What does he do, then? He attacks the spirit first, suggests vain thoughts and self-conceit on account of the purity preserved for such a long time, and that makes the soul look upon itself as better, more pious, and more perfect than others. If he succeeds in finding room for these thoughts, he will not have much trouble in destroying purity; for he knows that it must fall when pride enters the heart. But if, with all his craft, he cannot destroy humility in that soul, then he despairs of effecting anything and must take to flight.

2. From this humility of the heart must spring the outward humility of the body, or that modesty and reserve which is another necessary means of conquering the second enemy of your purity, namely, the allurements and seductions of the world. Modesty is a virtue which restrains all the senses and keeps guard over our behavior,

conduct, eating, drinking, and dress; it is the great ornament of all who practice it, but especially of the female sex. To gratify every curiosity of the eyes, and to allow them to roam about everywhere; to listen eagerly to what is going on in town; to allow liberties to be taken with one's self and to take them also with others, although they may be apparently harmless; to go about laughing and joking with persons of the opposite sex, although they may be near relations; to be anxious to see and be seen; to pay and receive many visits; to mix up with all sorts of company; to be vain and frivolous in dress; all that is unbecoming even in one who intends to be married; such a person is contemptible even in the eyes of the world, and although the world may flatter those who act thus, yet it ridicules them behind their backs.

What nonsense, some will think; I can be pure at heart, although I mix with people after the manner of the world; I need not sit like an owl at home; I intend to remain unmarried, and to preserve my purity, but I do not want to be called a devotee; I can best deceive the world by joining in its gayeties and conforming to its fashions and modes of life. Yes, you may deceive it, but take care that it does not deceive you first.

Think and say what you will, from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The outward behavior is an index of the dispositions of the heart. The property of true chastity is to tremble and fear at the very sight and voice of one of the opposite sex. Holy virginity is such a delicate flower that not alone the least touch, but even a look would cause it to wither. The proper place to preserve that flower is at home, alone in one's room, occupied with some suitable labor, unless one is obliged to go to church, to visit the sick, or to perform some other work of Christian charity and mercy which renders it necessary to go out of the house.

3. The third means of preserving perpetual chastity, in spite of the attacks of our worst enemy, the rebellious flesh, is earnest and hopeful prayer. It is an undoubted fact that perfect purity is a gift of God, and a most special gift, too, if we consider that the vast majority of men do not receive it. When Christ had explained to his disciples the indissolubility of the marriage tie they wondered at it, as an unheard-of thing, and said: "If the case of a man with his wife be so, it is not expedient to marry" he added: "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given" (Matt. 19:10-12). And immediately after, when he had spoken of the state of virginity, he said: "He that can take it, let him take it." It is certain, also, that no one, in the midst of so many dangerous temptations and carnal desires, can preserve this great gift by his own strength, without a special help from God, as Solomon says of himself while he was still innocent: "And as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it, and this also was a point of wisdom, to know whose gift it was: I went to the Lord and besought him" (Wisd. 8:21). This is what the Apostle meant when he wrote:

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). That is to say, that we may acknowledge the safeguard of the great treasure of virginity to be the working of the almighty power of God and that we could not have it of ourselves. Now, according to the present arrangements of his providence, God does not generally give his gifts and graces unless to those who pray to him, and he has promised to grant everything to prayer; his wish is that we should humbly and constantly acknowledge before him that we always stand in need of his help.

Pray, then, constantly, nay, according to the advice of St. Paul, let your minds be always united to God. For you, especially, who have determined to observe perpetual chastity, it is necessary to follow this advice. Say daily to God, in the words of the Wise Man: I acknowledge, oh, Lord, and thou knowest it, that I cannot live chastely unless thou helpst me; therefore I fly to thee, as to my only Helper and Protector, in the dangerous combat that I have to sustain against the desires of the flesh.

Christian sons and daughters, who are called by God to the unmarried state, you have powerful weapons to repel the attacks of the enemies of your chastity, in true humility, inward and outward modesty, and fervent prayer. Use these weapons constantly, and you may say boldly with St. Peter: Lord, it is good for us to be here; we will live in this state until death! I rejoice, then, at the happiness that the Lord gives you on earth, and at that which you will possess when you will follow the pure Lamb of God, whithersoever he goeth, in heaven. Amen.

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