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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. III = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

The Necessity of the Word of God for the Just

*"A great multitude followed him."* John 6:2.

Wherever our Lord went during the three years of his public ministry, he was always followed by a great crowd of people; but not all of them were animated by the same motive. Some went through curiosity to see the miracles he wrought; others were intent on watching all he did and marking what he said; others were carried to him to be healed of the bodily diseases from which they were suffering; and others went to listen to his preaching and instructions. The very best motive amongst them all was that of those who followed him to hear the word of God, to feed their souls with it, to be instructed in good, and to learn the right way to heaven. Among the great crowd there must have been many who followed our Lord for the reason of being desirous to hear him. Do we come to our Lord in the church for the same reason? Are we all eager to hear the word of God in sermons? You know that it is a bad and dangerous sign for a Christian seldom or never to hear a sermon; for, generally speaking, those who are in a bad or dangerous state of soul are enemies of the word of God. Hence I say

*To hear the word of God in sermons often and constantly is necessary even for those who are innocent and just, to work out their salvation.*

I do not speak of an absolute necessity, as if we could not possibly save our souls without it. Baptism is necessary for all men; faith in the one true God is necessary for all who have attained the use of reason; supernatural sorrow is necessary for those who have committed mortal sin. I do not say that sermons are necessary in that sense. What I mean is that, considering our innate ignorance in divine things, the many temptations, allurements, and evil inclinations that assail us, our own natural weakness and frailty, which makes it impossible for us to withstand those temptations for a long time, and moreover our propensity to many kinds of vice and our inconstancy in good, it is very difficult, nay, hardly possible for a man to work out his salvation as he ought, unless he is frequently enlightened, instructed, moved, and comforted by hearing the word of God.

What a desirable state is that of baptismal innocence, the state of justice, in which the soul, being adorned with sanctifying grace, keeps constantly in the friendship of God! But without the guidance and influence of the word of God, how long can that state last? Faith teaches us that, in order to do any good work deserving of heaven, we stand in absolute need of the forestalling and helping grace of God, which consists in the enlightenment of the understanding and the movement of the will. Without this enlightenment and movement, no one can hope that he will remain long in the state of innocence in the midst of so many snares, temptations, and dangers. Now, in the present arrangement of his providence, God has determined to give his graces in the ordinary course, at a convenient time, and by the ways and means which render us best disposed to receive those graces; among which means the chief is the hearing of the word of God. *"Faith cometh by hearing,"* says St. Paul, so that all supernatural, meritorious works, since they must spring from faith, must have their origin first in what is heard or understood by signs. *"And hearing by the word of Christ"* (Rom. 10:17), that is, you must receive the doctrine by the word of the Lord. *"How shall they believe him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"* (Rom. 10:14.) That is, how can men hear the word of Christ if there be no one to

announce and explain it to them? And I add: What can a preacher do for them if they do not come to church to hear him?

It is almost as bad as tempting God to think of persevering in good without ever hearing the word of God in sermons. St. Paul, after he had received that bright ray of light from heaven, and was moved to conversion by the powerful voice of Jesus Christ himself, was still obliged to go to Ananias, a man like himself, to be taught and instructed by him. Cornelius, the centurion, is spoken of in terms of the highest praise as a man who was always inclined to virtue, and who was given to prayer and works of devotion with his whole family, while he was very generous to the poor. Yet an Angel was sent from heaven to direct him to Peter, from whom he had to learn how he was to live in future. But why send for Peter? Could not the Angel have instructed Cornelius? An Angel can give more light to the human understanding in a moment than the most learned men in a long time; why, then, did not the Angel teach Cornelius what he had to do? No, a man had to do that. Christ appeared to St. Paul; why did he not instruct him? No, again that instruction had to come from another man. For God has so ordained that men should be instructed by men and learn his will from them.

If a piece of ground, no matter how fertile, is not sown, what will it produce, unless weeds, thistles, and thorns? No matter how strong and healthy a man may be, if he takes no nourishment for six, or eight days, what will become of him? If the traveler, in spite of his strength, has to go along a slippery and dangerous road in the dark night, without any light to guide his steps, what can he expect but to stumble and fall, and perhaps break an arm or a leg? What will be the consequence, then, when one rarely goes to a sermon? What fruit can the soul produce, no matter how good and innocent it is, if the seed of the divine word is seldom or never planted in it? Nothing can grow in it but weeds, thorns, and thistles, faults and imperfections of all kinds, sins and vices. The word of God is the food of the soul. "It is written: not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God". As the body is when It has been many days without food, so is the soul that is not fed often with the word of God; the body must necessarily grow weak, sicken, and die when deprived of its proper food; the soul must in the ordinary course of things become tepid in the divine service, and lose its spiritual life, if it is kept long without the word of God. The word of God is a light on the dark road that leads to heaven. Without this light, how could a poor, ignorant mortal travel along the dangerous and mostly unknown road that leads to eternity, on which many have lamentably come to grief? How could he hope to escape the dangers, occasions, and temptations to sin that surround him on all sides? Although a man is of good will to persevere in the way of salvation and in the friendship of God, and to gain heaven, yet, by neglecting the word of God, or through culpable ignorance, he can easily go astray, or fall through weakness, frailty, sloth, or tepidity.

How many Christians have to admit that they would often have fallen in that violent temptation, in that dangerous company into which they came against their will, and would have committed many sins, were it not for the sermons they had heard, and the good resolutions that the word of God inspired them with! For they learned to know their last end for which God created them, and why they are in the world, which is only to love God with all their hearts and serve him zealously, keep his commandments, and thus save their souls. They knew what they had to do and avoid in order to attain this end. And thus, having often heard the gravity and deformity of sin explained, they conceived a hatred, horror, and fear of all mortal sin, and made the firm resolution rather to lose everything in the world, and to suffer all conceivable torments and a thousand deaths, than consent to one grievous sin.

Unhappy sinner, how many of you might have kept your souls free from the filth of sin, if from your youth you had been accustomed to hear the word of God and to receive it with joy! But now your souls are like uncultivated ground, and are full of the weeds of sin and vice, because you have had little or none of the seed of God's word planted in them, and thus, through your own fault, they are become like barren, dried up ground, weakened and sickened by long-continued hunger and thirst, while divine love has died within you, as it was so long deprived of the nourishment of the word of God; thus it is that you have fallen so shamefully, as you had not the light of God's word to guide your steps. Be converted and begin now at least to make use of this powerful means to hear sermons, for that will induce you to do true penance and amend your lives. Hence parents will see the importance of their making a firm resolution, if they fear God, to accustom their children from their tenderest years to hearing Christian instructions and sermons. For, although the children will not understand all they hear, yet they will learn many truths which will be useful to their souls their whole lives long. They will

learn to hate sin and love virtue, to have a true love of God, to despise earthly and transitory things, to value heavenly goods, to work out their salvation carefully. "Come, children," parents should say in the words of the Holy Ghost, "hearken to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 33:12). Come with me, and I will bring you where you will learn to fear God, to serve him, to love him above all things with your whole hearts, so that we may one day all rejoice together in heaven.

Such, too, should be the determination of every one here, no matter how just and pious, learned and experienced, prudent and intelligent he maybe otherwise. Morally speaking, the spiritual food of the word of God is necessary for all Christians to enable them to work out their salvation properly. And let no one put forward the pretext suggested by worldly wisdom, that is folly in the sight of God; I do not want any one to preach to me; I know well enough what to do and avoid in order to gain heaven; I have already heard sermons enough, so that there can be nothing new in them for me now. What? Do you know all that can be said of the Gospel truths? That is indeed a proud and presumptuous thing for you to say! Preachers have to study for many years what they say in the pulpit for their own good and that of others; they must diligently collect matter out of the Holy Scriptures, out of the commentaries of the Scriptures, the holy Fathers and other spiritual writers; they must pray fervently to God to suggest to them the truths he wishes them to explain to their hearers, and how these truths are to be explained so as to be useful; and when they have thus spent ten, twenty, or thirty years, not one of them would be so proud and presumptuous as to maintain that he knows all that can be said about moral theology and the Gospel truths. And yet one who is occupied all the week with temporal cares, and has but one hour during that time to devote to the study of divine things, of which he learns simply what he can hear and bring away with him, pretends to know all about them! Supposing even (although I can not believe it) that you have heard all that can be said of the truths of faith, is your memory so wonderfully good that you do not require to be reminded of them now and then? Where is the man in the whole world who does not forget much that he has either heard, or read, or otherwise learned? Consider this one fact: the preacher has his matter deeply impressed on his memory; he reflects on it often; he makes notes of the sermon, and studies how he is to treat his subject so as to make the deepest impression on the minds of his hearers; he has to read many books that bear on the subject, and then he puts everything down in order on a paper, word for word; after that he must still read it perhaps ten times from beginning to end, so as to commit it to memory, and finally he repeats it almost word for word in the pulpit. Who would not think that he could not possibly forget it? And yet I can with truth say of myself that if I were asked how I treated this or that subject a month ago, I could not tell. And yet one who has heard the subject treated of once or twice many years ago can boast of having such a good memory that he does not require to be reminded of it?

Be that as it may to be instructed in good, to learn the divine truths and to be frequently reminded of them, is, you must know, the least fruit to be derived from the frequent hearing of the word of God; the chief end of the preacher is to move the wills of his hearers, that they may use what they hear, and learn and regulate their lives according to it. We may know a great many good things; the difficulty lies in doing them. King David was certainly enlightened in heavenly things; he knew well what terrible sins are adultery and murder, and what a miserable thing it is to be in the state of mortal sin, an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, a child of reprobation, a victim for hell; and yet for a long time he was not moved to repent and reconcile himself with God, whom he so ardently loved before, until the prophet Nathan showed him in a simile, the abomination he was guilty of. Then at last he came to himself, as if he had awakened out of a deep sleep, and he repented of and detested his sin, sighing forth from the depths of his heart: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2. Kings 52:13). I conclude with the words of the Holy Ghost: "Come, children, hearken to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Come, children of God, come sinners, too, unhappy children of reprobation as you still are, if you wish to become again children of God; I will teach you true penance, the fear of God, the love of God; neither I, however, nor any other preacher in the world can do that by his own strength, but the Holy Ghost will speak by preachers as his instruments and mouth-pieces, and will enlighten your mind, and move your hearts so that you will do good. Come to High Mass and sermons with hearts desirous of hearing the word of God; that most important of all affairs, our eternal salvation, our last end, for which alone we are in this world, all depend on it.

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