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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 + + +

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FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Guilt and Sinful Effects of Habitual Drunkenness

“Which of you shall convince me of sin?” John 8:46.

To drink more than one's health or income or reputation can bear, is folly, wickedness, and a shame! And yet it is an ordinary consequence of excessive drinking. Important as this consideration is, it would not matter much if the salvation of the soul and the law of God were not concerned also. For the worst of all the evil consequences of excessive drinking, which should be most effective to deter Christians from that vice, is, that most people drink more than is consistent with the salvation of their souls. But here some may be inclined to say, like our Lord in to-day's Gospel, “which of you shall convince me of sin”? What nonsense to say that it is a sin to drink a drop too much now and then! So common has this vice become that it is no longer looked upon as sinful. My object now is to show how false and wrong that idea is. I will convince you of sin.

I. *Deliberate drunkenness is always a mortal sin.*

II. *The habit of drinking much, although not to actual drunkenness, is very often a mortal sin.*

I. By perfect drunkenness I mean such a darkening of the reason through excessive drinking that one is incapable of doing a reasonable act. It is in excess in drinking, without just and grievous cause, by which a man knowingly and willfully deprives himself by violence and fully of the use of reason. In the first place it is called an excess in drinking, which is to be understood according to the capacity of each individual to bear a greater or smaller quantity of intoxicating drink. That quantity, therefore, whether it be great or small, is to be considered as excessive and as the cause of drunkenness, which in any individual case obscures the reason. Secondly, it must be without just cause; thus it is not a sin to take a medicine which deprives one for a time of the use of reason, or to get drunk if the doctor thinks it necessary for the recovery of health, because such a deprivation of reason arises from a just cause, namely, the avoidance of illness or the recovery of health. Thirdly, the deprivation of reason must be willful and deliberate; therefore, if a man, either because it is the first time, or because he has good reason for so judging from past experience, thinks that what he is about to drink will not hurt him, although through illness, or the strength of the wine of which he knew nothing, or through coming out suddenly into the fresh air, his reason is actually affected, as frequently happens, such a man is not guilty, because he did not foresee nor intend that drunkenness should follow from his act. Fourthly, I have said, “by violence.” He who lies down to sleep at night also deprives himself of the use of reason, not, however, violently,

but in the manner appointed by God, so that when he awakes he is at once ready to use his reason again. Fifthly, I have said that one must deprive himself “fully” of the use of reason; therefore, although the imagination is somewhat disturbed, and the tongue stammers and the eyes see double, and the feet are rather uncertain, nay, even though the stomach is forced to reject the wine that one has drank, as long as the reason is capable of acting and reflecting there is not perfect and mortally sinful drunkenness, provided there has been no wish or intention of getting drunk. Drunkenness, then, consists in the total deprivation of the use of reason deliberately and willfully caused or foreseen, and is a mortal sin.

Man always carries about with him a very precious image, namely, his reason. What a beautiful and costly image it is! And whose is it? It is the image of the Almighty God, who has given it to man as a token of his love. Now, if earthly lords are justly offended when an insult is offered to their coat-of-arms, although it is made only of wood or stone, do you think that the great God, who is so jealous of his honor and glory, and who cannot bear to see men offering the flesh of an animal to an idol, can see without displeasure his own living image wantonly disgraced and dishonored. And could a greater insult be offered to that image than to degrade it to the condition of a senseless creature, or of a beast, by drunkenness? What can be more degrading to a man than to bear the likeness of an irrational animal? What can be more degrading to the image of God than to turn it into the image of a beast? Is it likely that God will allow this injury to go unavenged? And is that a mere trifling sin, and one that we need not think much of? No, not without cause has God in his anger threatened woes and maledictions: “Woe to you that rise up early in the morning to follow drunkenness, and to drink till the evening to be inflamed with wine.” “Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds” And “Who hath woe? Surely they that pass their time in wine, and study to drink off their cups” (Prov. 23:29, 30). Nor shall drunkards possess the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:10).

There is still another characteristic in drunkenness which distinguishes it from other sins, and brings out its gravity more clearly; and it is this, that it makes man incapable of doing penance and being converted to God, and thus places the soul in certain danger of eternal damnation, when the time comes for him to leave this life. Suppose that a drunken man is overtaken by a mortal illness, or that he is grievously wounded, or otherwise, reduced to the last extremity; how could he prepare for death and the journey into eternity? In any other circumstances, when the Lord knocks at the door, if, like the foolish virgins, we have no oil in our lamps, as long as there is a spark of life left we have time to go and buy some; that is to say, if a mortal illness were to surprise us when engaged in the commission of any other sin, we might at least make an act of contrition with the heart, if we are not able to make our confession, and thus obtain pardon, though it is not likely that we should do so under the circumstances, and hardly one in a thousand finds pardon for his sins because he cannot use his reason. He is utterly incapable of receiving any Sacraments as long as he is in that state, and, of course, if he dies before becoming sober, there is no place for his soul but hell. And this is the reason why it is not lawful to drink to excess before going to bed at night, when one foresees that complete drunkenness is likely to ensue during sleep; because thereby one deprives himself willfully of the use of reason, and consequently is not able under all circumstances to attend to the salvation of his soul.

“Drunkards shall not possess the kingdom of God,” and you say that drunkenness does not matter much, that it is a general failing, and that it cannot be a great sin! Is it not a great sin, when God excludes men from heaven on account of it? If it is a general custom, and is therefore regarded as a trivial fault, so much the worse, so much the more is the evil to be deplored. You say that you are not the only one who drinks too much; is your sin any less on that account? Is that a reason why you should expect to be punished less severely for it? A soldier deserts, and induces twenty of his comrades to follow his example. If he is caught he will certainly be hung. Oh, he thinks, what does it matter? I am not the only one. No, you are not the only one, but you will see whether death will be any easier for you because you have twenty companions hanging on the gallows beside you!

II. To place one’s self deliberately in the proximate occasion and danger of sin is the same thing as to commit the sin; although in reality the sin is not committed. And the proximate occasion consists in those circumstances in which certain individuals know by experience that they always, or at least very often, fall into sin. Now, there is very little doubt that excessive drinking, although it does not take away the use of reason, is yet a fruitful source of many sins. You can use your own eyes and ears, and learn from your own experience. There are some, and, in fact, very many, who become quite friendly when they have drunk too much; but they are a great deal too friendly and too free in their conversation, far more so than is consistent with Christian modesty, or virginal or conjugal purity. With reason does St. Augustine say that wine, taken to excess, is “the shipwreck of chastity.”

Where are you most likely to hear unchaste jests, filthy talk and immodest songs, if not in saloons? Many a town would be freed from a great deal of impurity, seduction of the innocent, scandal and adultery if liquor were not so much used. Others grow quite talkative when tipsy, and reveal what was told them in confidence, thus doing much harm; nor do they hesitate to say boldly what they think of others, thereby injuring their neighbor's reputation. In fact, loquacity is so usual in a tipsy man that it would be a wonder indeed if a man in that state could manage to keep his unruly tongue in order. There are others who grow abusive when drunk. They curse and swear, and use all sorts of hard words against their neighbor, and, worse than all, they blaspheme their Creator! Others, again, become prodigal; they give away all they have, and drink and gamble until they have spent what ought to go to the support of their families. Others become irascible and quarrelsome, and are not easy until they have succeeded in picking a quarrel with some one; they have not a friendly word for any one, and thus give rise to hatred, enmity, and often murder. Others become so cruel and heartless that they ill-treat their parents, wives, and children, so that very often the poor wife has to sit trembling at home while her husband is drinking in the saloon, knowing well that when he comes home he will beat and abuse her, as if she were a naughty child who deserved punishment. It is clear that these and many other effects of excessive drinking are sinful, and mortally sinful. Therefore, he who knows by experience that immoderate drinking causes those effects in him, is bound under pain of mortal sin to avoid excessive drinking, although he does not intend to deprive himself fully of the use of reason.

I pity you unhappy wives who have to suffer poverty, or ill-treatment, through your drunken husbands. Hard as your state is, it is not that which excites my pity, for it is a cross that God has laid on your shoulders for the salvation of your souls, and that you may earn much glory in heaven, if you only make use of the opportunity, and practice patience and resignation to the will of God. There is, however, one thought which could make me shed tears of blood, and that is, that you turn this occasion of gaining merit for your souls into an occasion of eternal damnation to yourselves by your excessive impatience and despair; for it often happens that you go from temporal into eternal suffering! For how do you sometimes act when your husbands come home, half or wholly drunk? Do you not often abuse and curse them, and call them drunken beasts, and call down all sorts of imprecations on them, and give utterance to everything that your anger suggests? What do you gain by such conduct? Your husbands, who are already not in a disposition to bear the least word of contradiction, on account of the state in which they are, return you curse for curse, and abuse for abuse; and so you become an occasion of additional sin. And what better are you for it? You get a sound drubbing, and, sooth to say, you richly deserve it! Do you know how you should act? That is no time for reproof or remonstrance; as the saying is, if a man meets a wagon loaded with hay, he has nothing to do but to get out of its way; and so also you should give way to your husbands when they are too full of drink. You must hold your tongues, give way, return soft answers, say that it is a good thing to take a drop now and then, and bear ill-treatment with patience; there is no better plan for you to adopt. The next day, when the fumes of the liquor have disappeared, and you think your husbands are in a better humor, you can remonstrate with them with humility, modesty and love, and beg of them to amend and to cease causing you such suffering. If that does not help you, then you must pray earnestly to the Lord of hearts, that he may give your husbands the grace of conversion. Resign yourselves humbly and patiently to the will of God; unite your trials with the bitter Passion and death of Jesus Christ, recall your past lives and see whether you have not perhaps committed some grievous sins, and accept your sufferings as a punishment for them from the hands of God.

"Awake, ye that are drunk," I say to you, oh, drunkards, for the last time, "and weep and mourn all ye that take delight in drinking sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth" (Joel 1:5). Weep and mourn over your unhappy and almost desperate state! Acknowledge and bewail the madness with which you ruin your health, your fortunes, and your good name! Bemoan your wickedness with tears of repentance, and atone for the many sins you have committed by intemperance! Weep as Esau did, when he satisfied his gluttony by selling his birthright for a mess of pottage; for you have given up your eternal inheritance in heaven, that you may indulge your inordinate desires! Weep, and beg of God with all humility to avert the woes that will surely fall upon your heads, unless you repent! Amen.

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