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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

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

The Keeping of the Commandments of God

*“If any man keep my word, he shall not see death forever.” John 8:52.*

No one wishes to go to hell; all desire heaven; but it seems to many, there is a very difficult condition attached to the fulfillment of that desire: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:27). Baptism is not enough, nor to be a member of the one true Church; nor is it enough to have faith and hope, nor is it enough to love God with the lips alone. “If any man keep my word,” that is, my law, he shall not see death forever but possess eternal life. No Christian doubts that it is absolutely necessary to keep the commandments in order to gain heaven; but there are many who ask the question: Why is it that God who truly wills all men to be saved, has placed so many and such difficult commands upon us, which most people in the world violate, and thus are shut out from eternal happiness and condemned to hell? And again: Why has the same God forbidden us the very things to which we are naturally inclined, so that we cannot avoid them without great trouble and self-denial? Would it not have been better either to have given us no law at all, or else to have taken those inclinations away from us?

I. *All that God has commanded or forbidden is necessary for even the temporal welfare, of each one and of the whole community.*

II. *But since most of his prohibitions run counter to our natural inclinations, they are necessary also for our spiritual welfare in time as well as in eternity.*

I. Reason tells us that the commandments are necessary for the temporal prosperity of the world. You say that it is too hard to keep all the commandments, and to keep them exactly and constantly. But which commandment are you speaking of? Show me a single one of them all which is not acknowledged by all who use their reason properly to be necessary for the general welfare of the world.

Do you think it well that each one should be allowed to seek out a god according to his own fancy, an ox, for instance, a calf, or a brazen image? That each one should be allowed to adore the devil, to bend the knee to him, and ask his advice and help? No, certainly not; that must not be. God is our true God, and there is no other beside him. Very well, then, let the first commandment be: *“I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before me; thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing,”* to adore it. But now that he is to be recognized as the true God everywhere, do you think it would be right for his name to be blasphemed by the wicked, and to be uttered without reverence at the least provocation? No. Very well, then, let the second commandment be:

*“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”* Do you not think it would be right to have a day and a place set apart for his service? Certainly, there can be no doubt of it; Good! then we shall put this, too, amongst the other laws:

*“Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.”* What do you think is owing to those from whom, after God, one receives his life, his daily bread, his clothing, and all the necessities of life for years and years, and all bestowed with the greatest love and kindness? The answer to that is easy, for every sense of honor and decency requires that we should love them sincerely, and show them all honor and respect. Then let the fourth commandment be: *“honor thy father and thy mother.”* But now, supposing that men were allowed to act as they pleased towards their fellows, to hate them, persecute them, curse them, revile and calumniate them, and beat, wound, and murder them; if men were allowed to take away each other’s property; if the sexes could live without any more restraint than dumb animals, do you think that it would be conducive to the general good? Certainly not. Therefore we shall put amongst our written laws the following: *“Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor!”* But since willful thoughts and desires are the road to excesses that must not be permitted, would it be right to allow every one to indulge his thoughts and desires without restraint? No. Good! Then we shall put a stop to such desires by the commandments, *“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods.”* See, there we have all the laws that are prescribed for us by God, and you and every reasonable man must approve of them and acknowledge that they are necessary for the general welfare.

Let us for a moment suppose the contrary were the case; let us take away the commandments, either altogether or at least in part, and what sort of a life should we then have in the world? Suppose that children are permitted to show disrespect and give trouble to their parents as they please; that servants are allowed to disobey their masters; that subjects can revolt against their spiritual and temporal superiors; what disorder and confusion would be caused by the abolition of this one law! And if the others were abolished as well, what would be the result? If no one were forbidden, but every one allowed to take revenge as he pleases; if there were no restraint placed on murder, adultery, unnatural crimes, theft, robbery, and injustice, what a state the world would come to! Who could trust his neighbor, when one cannot be sure of him? The world would resemble a wilderness inhabited by wild beasts, or the hell of the damned, rather than the habitation of reasoning creatures. Thus we must all confess that reason itself teaches us the necessity of the divine law to keep the world in temporal prosperity. And if God had given us no such law, all sovereigns and superiors would publish in their towns and communities those very same precepts which the Monarch of heaven and earth has given us, and would compel their subjects to observe them under severe penalties. In fact, even the civil authority punishes transgressions of this law, when they are publicly and judicially proved. Nay, almost all civil laws and ordinances tend to urge the strict observance of the divine law, simply because all who are of right mind must confess that the world cannot be kept in order without it.

But some will think: all that is true enough; but, alas, what poor, weak, miserable creatures we are! The greater number of the commandments are contrary to our natural inclinations and desires, and we are so strongly urged to transgress them, that we cannot be sufficiently on our guard. But this very objection refutes itself, for, since we are inclined by our corrupt nature to unlawful things, the necessity for their being forbidden is all the greater; otherwise all men would do those things without fear or shame, and would thereby interfere with the general well being. For the very reason, that our inclinations are prone to do what is wrong, that wrong-doing must be forbidden, not merely for our temporal welfare, but also, which is much more important, for our spiritual welfare, in this life and during eternity.

II. The greatest happiness that a reasoning being can have in this life consists in the possession of the greatest good, that is, in the continual remembrance and love of God, and in the joy in God that springs therefrom. For, just as the centre of the earth is the point of attraction of all heavy bodies, so God alone is the end and aim of reasoning souls; therefore, as the stone, for instance, finds no rest until it lies on the earth, so the human soul can have no true repose or true enjoyment until it is united with God. “Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thyself,” are the well-known words of St. Augustine, “and our heart is restless until it reposes in thee.” This we know by experience, and each one of us whose conscience is not hardened in guilt must confess that it is true. When a man has left God by committing a grievous sin, and made him an enemy, can he say with truth that he was easy in his mind even during the enjoyment of the forbidden pleasure? Must he not acknowledge that, at least after

the sinful act, he was filled with uneasiness, melancholy, doubt, and anxiety? that his perturbed conscience often reproached him most bitterly, and that he often said to himself in the agony of remorse: “Ah, what have I done ! I have lost the Supreme Good, I have become the enemy of God, and now he can cast me into hell when he pleases”? On the other hand he must acknowledge that he felt great interior satisfaction and joy of heart after having laid down the heavy burden of his sins in the Sacrament of Penance, because his conscience said to him: I am now a friend and child of God. Nor can it be otherwise; our true rest is in God alone, and therefore the poor servant-maid who loves God with her whole heart, is far more cheerful and happy than the king or emperor who has separated himself from God by sin.

But you will say: if God is so desirous of our love, why did he give us such a weak, miserable nature, that is so violently inclined to forbidden pleasures? Day and night almost we have to fight against ourselves in order to avoid sin. Nay, those evil inclinations make themselves felt even against our rational will, and we have great difficulty in repressing them. God has not given us a nature that is weak, corrupt, and inclined to sin; that is an effect of original sin, in which we are born. God has left those frailties in us, in order to make our happiness greater in heaven. He has proposed to us the kingdom of heaven as a reward for all our labor and trouble, and we can gain it by keeping his commandments; nay, he has given us those commandments that we may have all the more joy in heaven. A good may be very great in itself, but if it costs nothing, if every one can easily get possession of it, men do not consider it worth having. The happiness and enjoyment that we gain by our own hard work is far sweeter to us than what is given to us without any merit on our part. Now, what labor or trouble would be required to keep the commandments, or what merit should we gain by keeping them, if there were neither any difficulty in the commandments themselves, nor any tendency in us urging us to transgress them? In such a case the joys and glory of heaven would, as it were, fall into our laps, and we should have no need to strive for them; therefore we could not truly rejoice in eternity, not call our glory our own, since we should have done nothing to secure it; nor could any one earn a higher degree of glory than another, since all should have an equal facility in keeping the commandments.

But why should I take such trouble to defend or palliate the difficulty there is in keeping the divine law, which is so just and so necessary to the welfare of the whole human race? Is not the beautiful heaven that God has promised us worthy of a little trouble that we can make up our minds to endure in this Life, that we may be happy with God forever? Consider the pains people take, the difficulties they face, for some wretched, worthless thing, and that, too, with the greatest willingness. How the hunter plagues himself in the pursuit of game! He interrupts his sleep early in the morning, and is out before sunrise; he thinks nothing of enduring hunger, thirst, cold, rain, and snow for the length of a day; he runs through hedges and bushes, climbs high mountains, descends into deep valleys, and all that for the sake of killing a miserable hare; that is all he gains by it, and yet he calls that labor a pleasure and a delight. And must we look on the delights of heaven as deserving of less trouble, as being less able to sweeten a much lighter toil? The workman is satisfied when he finds an employer who will certainly pay him the proper wages at the proper time, and he works contentedly for such a man. The tradesman, too, is always most anxious to have some work to do, and he begs for it, if he cannot have it otherwise, in order to be able to make a little money and support himself and his family.

But God has difficulty enough to find any one who will serve him, if there is the least obstacle in the way. God, who will infallibly pay the wages, who has promised an eternal reward for a temporal service, has made but one condition in promising his reward, and that is, that we keep his law, a law which every sound mind must regard as necessary; but most of us complain of that condition, and find it too hard. We prefer to remain in the slavery of our corrupt flesh and its brutish desires, or to do the will of the perverse world, or to groan under the yoke of the devil, and thus to carry a far heavier burden, and lead a far harder life, which after a few years will end in the flames of hell, rather than to take up his sweet yoke by keeping his law and so secure for ourselves eternal happiness through a sheer imaginary fear of a little mortification which the observance of his law occasionally renders necessary. Such, my dear brethren, are the blindness and folly of men, which can hardly be sufficiently understood, never sufficiently bewailed.

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