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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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EASTER SUNDAY

Ingratitude, a Vice Hateful to God

“Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James and Salome, bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus.” St. Mark 16:1.

How strange that no one but these three pious women resolved to show the last honors to our dead Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to anoint His sacred Body in the sepulcher. And yet there must have been many people in the city of Jerusalem on whom our Lord had conferred great benefits during His life. Did none of them go to the sepulcher? No; they had already forgotten His benefits; in fact, many of them were amongst those who cried out to Pilate: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” With reason might our Lord have complained on this occasion, as He did when He cured the ten lepers and only one of them returned to thank Him: “There is no one found to return and give glory to God but this stranger” (St. Luke 17:18). All my friends have abandoned me; there is no one to pay me the last honors but those three women. That very complaint was a common one at all times, and in our own days, too, it is common enough; namely, that gratitude for benefits received is such a rare thing in the world. Sir Thomas More, the great English chancellor and martyr, used to say that “we write benefits on sand and injuries on marble;” that is, we never forget injuries, while benefits soon disappear from our memory. My words today will be directed against ingratitude, of which most men are guilty toward God, and I say:

Ingratitude toward God for benefits received is an abominable vice, hateful to God.

It is not ingratitude for one who has received a benefit to make no return for it, if it is impossible for him to do so, as long as he humbly acknowledges the obligation he is under, and honors, praises and loves His benefactor. Ingratitude is hateful to everyone; the earth brings forth no greater monster than an ungrateful man, and there is nothing so displeasing to God as ingratitude. We have an instance of this in the lepers: “Were not ten made clean?” said our Lord with displeasure, when He saw that the stranger was the only one who returned to thank Him, “and where are the nine?” The reason of His asking that question was to show how He disliked and detested ingratitude.

Ingratitude blocks the way against grace, and grace finds no entrance where it is. Imagine the state of one who has a passionate affection for another: he desires nothing more than to please the object of his love, and to shower benefits of all kinds upon him. But nothing troubles him more than to find that the latter attaches no value to his proffered services, or that other people interfere to prevent him from bestowing his favors on the

object of his love. Now, there is no created thing which has a stronger natural tendency to bestow itself on others than God has to shower down His graces and blessings on all, especially His rational creatures. What violence can set bounds to the Omnipotent, and compel Him to restrain His wishes and desires, so that He may not distribute His benefits as He wills? He is the Lord of all, and who can resist Him? No angel in heaven, no demon in hell, no power on earth. **Ingratitude alone is able to do this**; for its hateful malice violently binds the hands of the good God, so to speak, and keeps them closed, so that they dare not show their generosity and bestow their blessings.

Another circumstance that increases the malice and deformity of ingratitude is the fact that it steals away from God the only good that He expects from His rational creatures, namely, their grateful recognition of His benefits, and the honor and love they owe Him. In order to show His people how unjust they were to Him in this respect, He says publicly to them by David: "Hear, oh, my people, and I will speak, oh, Israel, and I will testify to thee; I am God, thy God. I will not reproach thee for thy sacrifices: and thy burnt-offerings are always in my sight. I will not take calves out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy flocks. For all the beasts of the woods are mine, and the cattle on the hills, and the oxen. I know all the fowls of the air, and with me is the beauty of the field. If I should be hungry, I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fullness thereof. Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats? Offer to God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows to the most High. Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. 49:7-16). Turn whither you will, look about you on all sides, you can find nothing with which to make a return to God for the benefits He has conferred on you, unless what He already possesses. There is only one thing which God has left to your free will, and which He can receive from you, namely, the gratitude and thankfulness, the honor and love that you owe Him for the countless blessings He has bestowed on you; this is the only return that God expects. Ungrateful man, who either refuse to acknowledge the benefits you have received from God, or forget them, or even return evil for them, see how you take from God by your ingratitude the tribute of honor and praise which is due to Him for so many reasons, and which is the only one He expects.

Behold the hideous deformity and injustice of the ingratitude of which you are guilty; inasmuch as you refuse to make to God that return which you could make Him so easily at any moment, and which depends on your own free will. In the Old Law God forbade fish to be offered as a sacrifice to Him. Why? Are there not good fish which have a delicate flavor? There are, but they cannot be caught without trouble, and, therefore God did not wish to have them offered to Him in sacrifice, because He requires no gift from us mortals, unless one that is always at the disposal of our free will, so that we can offer it to Him with little trouble. For the same reason, too, He would not accept wild animals in sacrifice, because it takes some trouble to hunt them. All He required as what people had at hand every day, such as oxen, sheep, goats and other domestic animals. He would accept no birds but doves, because they were tame and easily caught. And now in the New Law God has abolished all those sacrifices among Christians, because it would be too difficult for the poor to provide them; and He is perfectly satisfied to receive from us, as a return for the benefits He has conferred on us, what we can give Him without the least difficulty, namely, our grateful acknowledgement of His goodness.

How much easier it is to show gratitude to God than to man! How much more is required to satisfy a mere mortal for some trifling service he has rendered than to satisfy God for the countless benefits He bestows on us at every moment! Let a rich man say to his lawyer, who has gained an important case for him, or to his doctor, who has cured him of a dangerous illness: Sir, I thank you, and will always be grateful to you for what you have done me; I will never forget you, and during my whole life I shall hold you in special honor and esteem. Oh, the other would answer, that is all very fine; but what is the good of your gratitude or esteem to me? It will not fill my purse, nor help me to support my family. I have used my skill and knowledge, and given myself a great deal of trouble for you; I have therefore earned a certain amount of money, to which I am justly entitled, and I should be very glad indeed if you paid me; you can then be as grateful to me as you will, and hold me in esteem, if that is any satisfaction to you. But the God of goodness, from whom we have received everything good we have, is content with that which hardly anyone in the world would consider a sufficient return for an act of kindness! God does not want a reward, but honor and gratitude.

A great number of men are ungrateful to God, for they do not acknowledge His benefits. If it is ingratitude not to acknowledge one's benefactor, or the favors received from Him, how many there are who are blessed with special gifts of the soul, such as good understanding and memory, prudence and skill; of the body, such as health and strength, and beauty, and who have besides temporal blessings of fortune, such as riches; how many there are of that kind who never think that they owe all they have to God, and never dream of showing Him the gratitude they owe Him? Riches they look on as the fruit of their own labor, or as an inheritance they receive as a matter of course from their ancestors; the gifts of body and soul they consider only as objects of a vain self complacency. Everything they possess they use like swine feeding in the forest, which wander about all day eating all the acorns they can find, and when they are filled lie down to sleep without once looking up to the beneficent tree that furnished them with such abundance of food.

If it is ingratitude to forget the benefits one has received, oh, what bad memories we have in this particular! While Pharaoh's butler was still in prison with Joseph, who interpreted his dream, there was no end of his promises to speak to the king for him. But in spite of all his promises, as soon as he was set at liberty he forgot all about Joseph, who had to languish in prison for two years more. As long as we have the gifts of God directly before our eyes, that is, while we are actually receiving them from His hand, then we thank Him, if we have so much gratitude left; but hardly have we turned our backs and enjoyed what was given us, than we completely forget our Benefactor.

Oh, that we could always say with truth: I have offended my God by sin, and been ungrateful to Him; I have returned Him evil for good, but I am heartily sorry for it, and will never do so again! Which of the two has the greater reason to be thankful to God: he who has never committed a mortal sin, or he who, having committed mortal sin, has received the grace to repent and thus to save his soul from hell? Is it not a precious grace, that of preserving one's baptismal innocence, so that one has never lost heaven? Certainly, this grace is in itself the more excellent and rare, and is more to be desired than the grace of repentance; still, since this latter grace is less due to him who has offended God grievously, and since God has less reason for giving such a grace to His enemy, whom He could at once and without further delay hurl into hell, the converted sinner has more reason to thank God than the innocent man, who never deserved hell. And even after the benefit of having their sins forgiven they offend God by fresh sins. Is not absolution given in the holy Sacrament of Penance to hundreds of thousands of sinners? And amongst that great number there are hardly a few who prove their gratitude as they ought for such a benefit; hardly a few who endeavor to continue in the grace and friendship of God by serving Him zealously; hardly a few who do not return to their former sins and vices! After all these benefits there is hardly one who makes a proper return to God. Where are the nine whom He has made clean? Where are all the sinners whom He has freed from hell? They are in the same state as before, in their former sins. They are as full as ever of pride and vanity, of avarice, usury and injustice, of impurity, through which they seduce many immortal souls; of hatred and vindictiveness, of gluttony and drunkenness, of swearing, cursing, fault-finding and blasphemy; nay, they are worse than before.

If we have hitherto failed to acknowledge our sovereign Benefactor as He deserves, let us henceforth show Him our gratitude whenever He sees fit to send us trials and crosses by bearing them with patience; and let us not forget that it serves us right to be so tried on account of our past ingratitude to so good a God. If we have hitherto forgotten the divine benefits, let not a day pass in future on which we shall not remember them in order to return due thanks for them. If we have hitherto made a bad return to God for His goodness to us, let us now make atonement by avoiding even the least willful sin, by serving Him more zealously, by doing His will more exactly, and by loving Him more sincerely. Let no word proceed from our mouths, no work from our hands, no thought from itself in our minds without being directed by a supernatural intention to His honor and glory; so that, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, we may "offer the sacrifice of praise always to God" (Hebr. 3 : 15). Amen.

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