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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. 5 - THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Profit We Can Derive from the Consideration of the Trials of the Just and the Prosperity of the Wicked, As Far As the Resurrection Is Concerned

"I am the Good Shepherd: and I know mine, and mine know me." St. John 10:14.

Jesus Christ is our good Shepherd, who gives His life for His flock. Now, if we wish to be good sheep we must follow this Shepherd, no matter where He leads us, through thistles and thorns, as well as through flowers and roses. This Shepherd has gone before us, suffering and sorrowing; we must be ready to follow Him, as St. Peter warns us in today's Epistle: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps" (I. Peter 1:21). But let us be comforted! The same Shepherd has also gone before us in His glorious resurrection to eternal joys; if we follow Him in the path of suffering we shall also follow Him in the glory of His resurrection to heaven, and that is the end our Lord has in view when He sends the good and pious many trials and crosses, while He allows sinners and the wicked, who have no hope of a glorious resurrection, to abound in temporal prosperity. Nay, that very decree of divine Providence should confirm our faith and hope in the future resurrection to the joys of heaven, as I shall show; and I take as the basis of my discourse the two contraries, namely, the trials of the just and the seeming happiness of the wicked, as follows:

I. That the good in this world live in suffering, while the wicked abound in prosperity, strengthens our faith in the future resurrection to heaven.

II. It confirms our hope in the resurrection to heaven.

III. It inflames our love and desire for the resurrection to heaven.

I. The wickedness of the sinner comes chiefly from want of faith in a future life. How comes it that we find so many Catholics who are at least half atheists? I allude to those who live according to the senses, who trouble themselves least of all about how they stand with God, who put in an appearance at church through worldly motives and for fashion's sake, while they remain in the state of sin from year's end to year's end. They have no faith, or at all events a very weak and cold faith, in a future life, in which the just shall have eternal joys in heaven, while the wicked shall be tormented forever in hell. They know by daily experience that we must all die; but they imagine that death is the end of all things, and hence they say with the wicked in the prophecy of Isaiahs:

“Let us eat, and drink, for tomorrow we shall die” (Is. 22:13); let us enjoy the good things of this world as long as we can, for we may soon die, and then we shall have nothing more to expect. They often, indeed, read, or hear in sermons, when they come to listen to them, of a happy or unhappy eternity after death; but they imagine those things to be an empty dream, or idle threat, or a baseless fiction. They have gone so far in sin and the blindness it causes that they are like the wicked of whom David speaks: “God is not before his eyes: his ways are filthy at all times” (Ps. 10:5). What is the result of that? “Thy judgments are removed from his sight.” If they had a lively faith in an eternal heaven and an eternal hell, how could they thus possibly squander away their short lives in sin, and pay for a fleeting pleasure by an eternity of pain? No; you may say what you please; it is clear that in those people there is a want of lively faith.

1. Now the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the just confirm us in the belief that there must be a future life. It is certain that the wicked man commits many sins and that the just man does many good actions in his life. Good works merit a reward, and bad ones punishment even in worldly justice. God could not be God if he were not just; he could not be just if he allowed sin always to go unpunished, if he allowed supernatural good works to go always unrewarded. Now, many sinners live in prosperity and joys, in riches and abundance, a fact of which we complain, so that they are evidently not punished here below for their sins. On the other hand, a fact which we deplore, many good people live in sorrow and suffering, in poverty and distress, so that they are not rewarded for their good works here below; therefore, there must necessarily be after this life another life in which the wicked shall be punished and the good rewarded.

2. Again, it is certain that no sinner is so utterly a reprobate as not to do some good act now and then. Now, as the good works of the wicked are rewarded here, and the sins of the just punished, the former must expect punishment, the latter reward elsewhere. As the sinner performs all his good works in the state of sin, they are and remain dead, and therefore God is not bound to give any reward for them unless the sinner does penance; yet He is such a liberal, generous God, that He will not allow even such works as these to be unrewarded, but repays them in abundance, and as He cannot do that in the next life, where hell awaits the unrepentant sinner, He does it in this life, by granting the sinner prosperity, riches, the joys and pleasures of the world. On the other hand, there is no just man who has not either sinned formerly in his youth or does not now and then commit some daily venial sin. Now, where are they who do good here to enjoy their reward, and where are the wicked to receive punishment? “Son, remember,” shall God say to the sinner, as Abraham said to the rich glutton in hell, “that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime” (Saint Luke 16:25); therefore thou hast no further claims now; and if thou hast done any good on earth thou art already rewarded for it. Thou hast received wealth, health, pleasures and honors. I owe thee nothing further; thou hast received what thou didst seek. But now dost thou know how many sins thou art guilty of, for which thou hast not been paid during life? Now, therefore, it is thy turn to be in My debt; therefore thou art now tormented, and shalt remain so during My time, that is, for all eternity. Lazarus sat before thy door, a poor beggar amongst the dogs, suffering hunger and thirst, full of wounds and sores; thus he atoned for his sins, while he had not as yet received anything for his patience in bearing poverty and affliction, and for the other good works he performed for my sake; therefore “now he is comforted” (Saint Luke 16:25), therefore now during My time he shall enjoy consolation and an exceeding great reward. Try to understand this, ye vain children of the world, who live in wealth, honor, and prosperity on earth, and yet do not serve God zealously in your good fortune, as you ought, but commit many sins; conclude from this that after this life an eternity of pain awaits you. See how the mystery of the unequal fate of the just and the wicked, which seems so hard to explain, actually helps to strengthen the basis of our faith in the resurrection to heaven. But besides that, it strengthens our hope in the resurrection to heaven.

II. Already in the Old Law the just grounded their hopes of an eternal life on the trials of this. I hear Job speaking of the happiness of the future life as if he were already assured of it and had the title to it in his hand. “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and in my flesh I shall see my God” (Job 19:25, 26). Where? when? in what circumstances did he use those words? When he was the richest and greatest of the land? No, although he then served God in his first innocence, but when he was deprived of house and home, abandoned by all, lying on a dung-hill, covered with putrid sores, and bitterly complaining of his lot. The hand of the Lord has touched me; He has slain my children, taken my goods from me, and reduced me to extreme want. “His wrath is kindled against me, and He hath counted me as His enemy. He hath put my

brethren far from me, and my acquaintances, like strangers, have departed from me. My kinsmen have forsaken me, and they that knew me have forgotten me. They that dwell in my house and my maidservants have counted me as a stranger, and I have been like an alien in their eyes. I called my servant and he gave me no answer, I entreated him with my own mouth;" and he did not even deign to take notice. "My wife hath abhorred my breath;" she laughs at and mocks me. Yet after enumerating all those evils, he adds: "Who will grant me that my words may be written? Who will grant me that they may be marked down in a book with an iron pen, and in a plate of lead, or else be graven with an instrument in flint-stone?" For I know that my Redeemer liveth; I do not only believe it; I know and am sure of it; I know that I shall come to Him, and that I shall see God in this flesh. Whence had he that certainty? He found it in his great misery, in the harshness with which God treated him here.

When did Tobias count himself among the chosen children of God? "We are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from him" (Tob. 2:18). Was it not when, after a holy life filled with works of mercy, he lay down to rest, wearied with burying the dead, and the swallow's dung fell into his eyes and blinded him, while his friends came and mocked and ridiculed him?

If the just in the Old Law found such a sure foundation for their hope in the trials they suffered, how strong should not be the hope of pious Christians, since their trials are stamped and sealed by Jesus Christ himself, the king of the suffering, who by the testimony of His blood, as well as by word of mouth, assures us that crosses are title-deeds to the joys of heaven, and a sure pledge of eternal salvation? If our dear Lord had said in His Gospel that all who follow Him and serve Him zealously should escape crosses and trials, and be endowed with wealth, honor and pleasure, while He should reserve His trials for the wicked alone, then if we saw sinners enjoying prosperity and the good groaning under the weight of affliction, we should begin to wonder, to lose courage, and to despair of salvation. But when I read the Gospel and find that things are stated there quite differently; when we hear our Saviour saying clearly to his disciples: "You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice" (John 16:20); when we hear Him enumerating all the persecutions, calumnies, scourgings, crosses, and torments in store for them, and at the same time exhorting them to remember His words that they may not be disturbed: "These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized;... that when the hour shall come you may remember that I told you of them" (St. John 16 :1, 4). When we remember all this, and at the same time see by experience that those words are literally fulfilled, for as a general rule we find that the just are afflicted, while the wicked live in prosperity, then indeed we fear nothing as long as we serve God zealously; and even if we should be overwhelmed with afflictions we should not therefore lose hope, but rather comfort ourselves all the more in the thought of a glorious resurrection and eternal life. The same Son of God who has said to the just, "You shall weep," says also: "Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh." The same Son of God who says, "You shall be hated by all men for my name's sake," says also: "Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when they shall persecute you, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Be glad in that day and rejoice: for behold, your reward is great in heaven" (Saint Luke 6:21, 23). Now, the Son of God is in all cases infallible, and as His prophecy concerning the trials of the just is true, so also must be that regarding the eternal joys reserved for them.

III. Our desires for heaven are inflamed by the afflictions we suffer. It is natural for one who is confined in a gloomy dungeon to long and sigh for his release all the more eagerly the greater the hardships and discomforts he has to endure. And it is also beyond a doubt that the trials and crosses of this life, in which we are confined as in a prison and vale of tears, excite a love and earnest desire for the joys of heaven, especially in those who groan most under the weight of affliction. Is it surprising that heaven should be so insipid and earth so agreeable to one who enjoys all the delights of the world according to the wishes of his heart? But on the other hand, consider the poor, oppressed servant of God sighing and moaning under the weight of the cross like another Job; you will hear him saying: "My soul is weary of my life" (Job 10:1). The day and night seem to me as long as a year; when shall it all have an end? When shall I attain the repose I long for? The persecuted David cries out: "When shall I come and appear before the face of God? My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?" (Ps. 12:3, 4) Saint Paul, overwhelmed with various trials, exclaims: "I am straitened: having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). And one of the reasons that God has for leaving his faithful servants in affliction and suffering is, that they may grow tired of and disgusted with earth and turn all their desires and aspirations to heaven.

But, vain children of the world! if you have any common sense left, you have not the least title to this eternal joy if you live as you have hitherto done; you have received your good things in this life. Oh, how poor you will be on that day! How confused you will be to see a poor peasant, or workman, or servant, a desolate widow, an orphan child whom you despised, nay, perhaps oppressed and persecuted, to see them entering into heaven and taking possession of everlasting joys, while you shall have to suffer in hell like the rich glutton, and to sigh when too late, like those of whom the Wise Man speaks: "These are they whom we had sometime in derision and for a parable of reproach;" whom we looked on as the dust under our feet, or as silly people who did not know how to live in the world: "Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the Saints." Fools that we are! we must lie in the midst of flames covered with shame and confusion forever and ever. Amen.

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