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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 + + +

Volume two = The Penitent Christian

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Evil Thoughts

“Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.” John 16:22.

How sad and forlorn were the hearts of the disciples when their beloved Master said to them: “A little while, and you shall not see me.” Still, there was some consolation in store for them “A little while and you shall see me;” and then your sorrow shall be changed into joy; “your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.” Far more sorrowful is the state of those sinners to whom God can say, after confession: “A little while and you shall not see me!” For, in a little while, by relapsing into sin, they will drive the divine Guest out of their hearts, and lose his grace and friendship. Perseverance in good is the surest sign of a future resurrection with Christ to glory, and of his possession in heaven; hence, to avoid relapse into sin, and to encourage you to be constant in the divine service, I will now proceed to draw some considerations from that exhortation of the Holy Ghost addressed to us all by the Wise Man: “With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it” (Prov. 4:23). Therefore, O man, carefully guard your heart from all evil thoughts and desires, if you wish to continue in the grace of God and to rejoice with him in heaven. There are two questions which I propose answering in this instruction.

- I. *Are all evil thoughts sins? And,*
- II. *When are evil thoughts sins?*

I. An immense proportion of people imagine that as long as they do nothing wrong in outward act, they need not trouble themselves about their evil thoughts and desires. For instance, a man is grossly insulted. He goes about full of bitterness and enmity, he consents to revengeful thoughts, desires, and plans. Through want of opportunity, or for some other reason, he, perhaps, refrains from fulfilling in act, his plans of revenge. Another, given over to idleness and self-indulgence, allows his imagination to be possessed with, all sorts of abominable images. He takes pleasure in those imaginations and impure thoughts. He entertains the evil desire. But through shame, human respect, or want of opportunity, he does nothing wrong outwardly. Now, both these people think, themselves innocent, and when they go to confession the one forgets the revengeful, the other the impure thoughts, and neither thinks of repenting of and confessing such thoughts. As long as they abstained from sinning in outward action, they imagine that their thoughts and desires are of no importance. If they happen to hear in a sermon, or elsewhere, that it is not lawful to consent to bad thoughts and desires, they fall into a still

greater error, by persuading themselves that such consent consists only in action, or at least in a firm purpose and eager desire to do the evil deed when opportunity offers.

Such souls are deceived by the devil.

God's justice differs widely from that of man. If affirmed, even on oath, that, a thousand times, I had a firm purpose of stealing, murdering, or committing adultery, if the occasion were given me, no earthly judge could condemn me on that account; for, if he cannot prove me guilty of the act, he must acquit me. "Man seeth those things that appear," says the Lord God; "but the Lord beholdeth the heart" (I Kings 16:7); that is, men judge of nothing, but what they see, while God wishes to have the whole man as an unspotted sacrifice, not only as to his body, but especially, as to his soul and his heart, the most precious part of him. What did it help the foolish virgins that their lamps were clean outwardly, and well-polished, since they had no oil in them? "I know you not," said the heavenly Bridegroom to them, when they knocked at the door; away with you! In vain, does a man flatter himself that he has preserved his purity of body, if his heart is sullied with unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore, we read: "Take away the evil of your devices from my eyes" (Isai. 1:16). "Turn ye from your evil ways, and from your wicked thoughts" (Zach. 1:4). Our divine Lord tells us that we must not even let our desires tend to evil: "But I say to you: that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (St. Matthew 5:28).

One can sin, then, by mere thought? Certainly, and that, primarily, more dangerously than by outward act. Primarily, I say, because it is from thoughts that all sins and vices take their origin. Before I do anything evil in action, I must first have the will and determination to do it; and before I can arrive at such a determination, I must necessarily think about it. Therefore, Christ says: "But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man: for from the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies," as from the source whence they derive their origin (St. Matthew 15:18, 19). Sins of thought are more dangerous, because, according to the words of the Council of Trent, "sometimes they wound the soul more grievously, and are more dangerous, than those which are committed in outward act." Why so? Because they are committed with greater facility and less fear; because they are committed oftener and in greater number; because they are generally more difficult to avoid.

The devil does not try to tempt a pious man at once to an impure act. He sees clearly enough that he would not succeed. But bad thoughts creep into the heart before one is aware of them; and as they do not cause such shame or fear as outward acts do, they force themselves in gradually, until, at last, they are deliberately entertained. "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light" (John 3:20). The wrong-doer seeks solitude, and even the most abandoned is not so shameless as to sin outwardly and in the presence of others. But in thought and desire one can sin without shame, at all times, in all places; yea, even in the holiest places and occupations, in religious houses, in the wildest deserts, in the churches consecrated to divine service, before the altar and the very eye of God, at devotions and prayers, bad thoughts enter the heart, and often give one enough to do to drive them away.

Who could count the number of sins committed in a month, a week, or even a day, by one who does not know how to guard his heart carefully, and allows it to dwell on bad thoughts? The vindictive, the unchaste man, before gratifying his revenge or his lust, even once in outward act, has already committed a hundred mortal sins of thought; nay, to speak more correctly, his daily thoughts and desires are one continued, uninterrupted sin of the heart.

We read of the husbandman, in the Gospel: "While men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way" (St. Matthew 13:25) There is a vast difference, between sowing and planting. The latter takes some time, while the former can be done quickly, and without any trouble. How many seeds cannot one scatter in a quarter of an hour! All you have to do is to open your hand and let them fall over the ground, and they will produce abundant fruit. "His enemy came and oversowed cockle," That is what the devil, our worst enemy, does. He sows the sins we commit in thought and desire. All he has to do is to scatter in the heart and mind a handful of seeds, that is, of impure or other forbidden images, and then he can go his way, and await the result without further trouble. The evil seed once received and nourished in the heart, innumerable sins will be the harvest.

No sins are more difficult to avoid than those which are committed in thought and imagination. Even long after Christians have repented of their sins of impurity, and have made their peace with God, the forbidden

pleasures they have once enjoyed frequently recur to the imagination ; and those experienced in the matter, tell us that such men have great difficulty in always promptly overcoming such thoughts. Theirs is a grievous and dangerous combat, and one requiring an extraordinary help and grace from God.

Those especially who have led sinful lives never run greater danger of eternal damnation than in their death-agony; for then the raging demon summons up all his strength in order to ruin their souls in the short time that remains to him. He strives to lead into sin, and after sin, to drag down into hell, those who have escaped from him by true repentance. Now, I ask, what sort of a sin would the devil be likely to tempt me to with his suggestions, in my last moments, when I see before my eyes the home of my eternity? To some unlawful, shameful action? No, indeed; for I should not have strength for such a sin as that, nor opportunity, either. Therefore, the aim of his temptations must be thoughts and desires alone. And there is no doubt they are the means by which the demon betrays and perverts those who abandon God at the last moment, O unhappy Christians, who live according to the wanton desires of the flesh, and rarely reject impure thoughts and desires, how will it fare with you in your last combat, if the devil should try to re-awaken evil desires in your heart, and to represent to your imagination the object of your former unlawful love, the forbidden pleasures you enjoyed! How will you be able to defend yourselves against such temptations then, if you have never properly opposed them during your lives? Will you not, alas! be overcome at the last moment by those assaults of the devil, and hurried down to hell, even after you have confessed your sins with every apparent sign of repentance?

Truly, if the souls of the departed could return to tell us how they fare, we should find a countless number who lost heaven by yielding to evil temptations in their last moments! Amongst a thousand who habitually lead bad lives, you will hardly find one to die a happy death, if he does penance only when death is at his door; partly on account of the danger he runs of not sincerely repenting under such circumstances, and partly on account of the danger of not receiving the grace of final perseverance, although he may have sincerely repented, because he has rendered himself unworthy of that grace during his life. Remember too, how very hard it is for a man who has been accustomed to the odious vice of impurity, and has not learned during life to watch over his heart, to resist bad thoughts and desires even in his last moments. Hence, the Holy Ghost warns us all, in these words: “With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it.” Keep your hearts from sinful thoughts, if you are earnestly desirous to persevere in good, for from the heart comes all that is good and bad. Life and death come forth from it. But, tell us, you say:

II. *When are bad thoughts sins?*

Only when one consents to them, takes pleasure in them. It is one thing to suffer temptations, and another to allow, one’s self to be overcome by them; it is one thing to have impure images in the imagination, and another to accept those images and deliberately to take pleasure in them. Therefore, bad thoughts, no matter how horrible they are, as long as one is displeased at them and tries to resist them, are not only not sinful, but bring a great increase of merit for heaven; not only are they not injurious to chastity and purity, but they make that virtue more beautiful and glorious, like gold that is purified by the fire. God allows his dearest children to be tempted by them, that they may increase in humility, acknowledge their misery, fly for refuge to him with greater confidence and earnestness (like a child to its mother, when a barking dog frightens it), and that they may guard their outward senses more carefully, avoid all dangers and occasions of sin, and so increase daily in virtue and gain more glory in heaven by conquering in those combats. Therefore, it is consent alone that makes bad thoughts sinful.

Now, there are three ways in which we can deal with bad thoughts; first, meritoriously; second, sinfully; and thirdly (which is the worst of all), by the deliberate desire and intention of exciting the evil thought at the first opportunity.

1. God has entrusted to each one of us a soul, to be guarded for him alone as its lawful Lord, since he has bought it with his blood. But the sworn enemy of God and man suggests to that soul evil thoughts. He sends it, as it were, a treacherous letter to persuade it to forsake God, and follow him. He represents to the imagination some alluring object, some enticing beauty, some carnal pleasure, as a reward for the traitorous soul. A pious man, the moment he is aware of the, evil thought, puts it away at once out of his mind, thinks of something else, and sends the wicked letter to his Master; that is, he sighs to God in heaven with king Ezechias: “Lord, I suffer violence, answer thou for me” (Isai. 38:14); the hellish wolf is behind me; help me and do not abandon me! see

what a horrible proposal he is making to me! It is against my will, for I am determined to be faithful to thee, my sovereign God, forever! And although those evil thoughts and imaginations return a thousand times, he renews a thousand times his determination, and is always displeased at them, although the flesh finds pleasure in them. O happy soul! these attacks, these wicked suggestions will not harm you! By their means, you can prove all the better your fidelity to your Master, and can gain still brighter jewels for your crown in heaven.

2. Another, being tempted with bad thoughts, at first continues them through curiosity, and afterwards finds pleasure in deliberately speculating on what is presented to his imagination; although he does not resolve, nor has any desire, to do any impure outward action. He has only a willful pleasure in the wicked thoughts. Alas! he is already guilty of perjury towards God! The sin is complete, partly, because a willful, deliberate dwelling on impure thoughts is itself apt to lead to impure feelings, and partly on account of the proximate danger of consenting to unchaste desires.

3. Finally, another not only dwells with deliberation on the impure thoughts, when he is aware of them, but also has the wish and desire to accomplish the impure act when he has the opportunity of doing so. This is a far worse sin than the former, and it must be declared exactly in confession. For it would not be enough, for me to say in such a case: "I have had willful pleasure in impure thoughts;" I must add: "I have also had the deliberate intention of doing the impure act." Moreover, you must declare what kind of an act it was that you wished to do. For instance, you have had a desire to see unchaste things, to be guilty of impure touches, to sin with a single or a married person, or with a near relation, or with one consecrated to God. All these different circumstances must be declared in confession, according to the nature of the sin.

"Therefore, with all watchfulness keep thy heart." Keep your precious soul for your God and Lord, who has given it into your care, and who will one day demand it of you; and that you may do so all the more easily, guard your heart most carefully from all bad thoughts and desires! With what great care does not a man look after his money, lest it should be stolen from him! He will not allow it to remain on the table, although he may have every faith in the honesty of his servants. It is put away in his safe, and it is well locked. The door of the room in which the safe is kept is bolted and barred. The door of the house and the shutters of the windows are most carefully closed every night; and all this is done to keep a piece of metal from being stolen. Ah, immortal, precious soul, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ! are you, then, of less importance? Must I lose you for a miserable, momentary thought? Lucifer and countless numbers of angels were hurled from heaven to the pit of hell, where they will burn forever, for one momentary, sinful thought. "Alas!" so should each of you say to himself: Woe to me if I, too, should have to burn there for one voluntary bad thought! Unhappy me! how would not the remembrance of my folly torture me!

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