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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. 4 - THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Unnecessary Troubles of Married People

“You shall be made sorrowful.” John 16:20.

The ordinary, and, as I think, beautiful salutation among the ancient Greeks, when meeting one another in the street, was: “May you do well and be joyful.” In our days we have other forms of greeting, such as: Good-morning, good-evening, good-day, a happy new year, or, if one is going anywhere, a pleasant journey; or, if one wishes to pay compliments, he says, your servant, your most obedient servant, and most frequently these expressions are mere empty words, and nothing more. I will address you after the manner of the Greeks, and wish that you *may do well and be joyful*. This is my heartfelt wish for you especially, married Christians, and I wish most earnestly that I could really cause you to feel this most desirable joy. But our Saviour has said something else to all his elect who do good and try to live piously: ‘You shall be made sorrowful.’ In the married state, especially, as you well know, there are, now and then, reasons enough for sorrow. Either the marriage is unfortunate, so that you do not live peacefully together, and that is, indeed, a great cross, or if it is fortunate, so that you live in peace and love together, and that is a great blessing, indeed. Yet you often find things to trouble you, some of which give you reasonable cause for sorrow, while you yourselves make crosses and troubles of others without any necessity, nay, sometimes even when you should have rejoiced at them.

I. Some married people trouble themselves without any reasonable cause.

II. Others trouble themselves when they should rather rejoice.

I. Sadness is a pain and perturbation of mind, on account of a suffering from which one wishes to be freed, or on account of an unsatisfied desire. There are four kinds of sadness:

1. The first is when one is troubled, at seeing or knowing of the sufferings or misfortunes of another; thus, the mother is troubled at the pain her child suffers, the friend on account of his friend's misfortune, and every kind-hearted man at the misery of his fellow-man. This sadness is called *compassion* or *pity*.

2. The second is, when one is troubled at another's wellbeing, because, for instance, the other is richer, more learned, or happier. Such was the case with Joseph's brethren when they saw him more richly dressed than they were. This is *envy*.

3. The third is when one is grieved at what he believes to be an injustice, or a thing that should not occur, although it may not concern him. Thus, many a one is grieved at a manifest wrong, or because another is

intrusted with a charge that he is not fitted for. This is called *indignation*. If this is caused by something contrary to the honor due to God, it is called *pious zeal*.

4. The fourth kind of sadness is the grief that every one feels in contradictions that affect himself, and that trouble either the soul or the body. Thus, the merchant is grieved at the losses he has suffered, or because he has not gained a lawsuit; an honorable man is grieved at an insult offered him; a husband is grieved at the death of his wife; the wife at the death of her husband; the parents at the illness or death of their children. And this is what is properly called *sadness*.

None of these four kinds is of any use when it is excessive, or when it comes from an unreasonable cause; and it is one of the rarest arts in the world to know how to be sad, and how to be joyful, at the proper time, and in the proper degree. If all men, and especially married people, understood this art thoroughly, and used it properly, how much unnecessary trouble would be avoided! Many things occur in the married state which give just cause for trouble and sadness, but it is true, nevertheless, that many people make their troubles greater than they ought to be; nay, they often trouble themselves without any reasonable cause. They seek troubles with a lantern, and bring them into their houses, contrary to the warning:

“Give not up thy soul to sadness, and afflict not thyself in thy own counsel” (Ecclus. 30:22).

I will say nothing of those who annoy themselves about things that do not concern them; like that malefactor who, while he was being led to the gallows, kept on grumbling and murmuring the whole way. And what was he grumbling about? About having to die such a shameful death, as any one would imagine? That would, indeed, be a rational subject for discontent; but that did not trouble him. He was annoyed because the streets were not better kept, and were allowed to be encumbered with all sorts of rubbish. Oh, foolish man, how do the streets concern you? Leave the care of them to the other citizens, who must walk on them many times a day and often experience the inconvenience of them. What is it to you whether the streets are clean or dirty, well or ill kept, since you will never walk on them again? Any street is good enough to walk to the gallows on. In almost the same manner do many make troubles and annoyances for themselves, and grumble at things that they have, so to say, picked up in the streets. Look, they say, what a grand house such a one has built, as if he wished to spite us and other decent people! See how finely that woman and her daughters are dressed, and what airs they put on, as if we did not know them! It is enough to make one cross; could we not do the same if we chose? If I could not fill that office better than such a one, I would not undertake it; he is only fit to annoy the people. They trouble themselves with things of this kind, and sometimes to such an extent that they become quite unhappy and discontented. Why do you plague yourselves about such foolish things? I must ask you:

“What is that to thee?” (John 21:22). Why do you trouble yourselves with the concerns of others? Have you nothing to annoy you at home? If you have not, you ought to live in peace and be cheerful. Do not seek for troubles, especially in matters that do not concern you.

Another source of trouble, common enough amongst married people especially, even when they live together in harmony, is that they make crosses and trials for themselves in their own imaginations, where in reality none exist, or they make mountains out of molehills. People are often more troubled at fancied troubles than at real ones, like horses that are afraid of their own shadow on the road. We have an example of this in the prophet Jonas. Behold him seated alone, full of sorrow and affliction: “And Jonas was exceedingly troubled and was angry” (Jon. 4:1). Poor prophet! what is the matter with you, that you weep and lament so? Here is what ailed him:

At the command of God he had gone through the great city of Ninive, and foretold its destruction to its inhabitants in these words: “Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed” (Jon. 3:4). But since the people, terrified at the prophecy, had done penance and repented for their sins, God was appeased, and, recalling the sentence he had pronounced, resolved to spare the city. Jonas, meanwhile, was anxiously awaiting the fortieth day, as that on which his prediction was to be fulfilled. He looked up to heaven and down to earth, hoping to see some sign that his prophecy was coming true, but in vain! The fortieth day passed, and several more days also, and Ninive was still untouched. That was what troubled Jonas so much. Filled with shame, and hiding his face so that no one might recognize him, he slunk out of the city into a deserted place, and there commenced his lamentations:

What, he said, am I the preacher and prophet, to be thus put to shame? I have been told to announce an event that was sure to happen, and now the contrary takes place; thus I am a false prophet, that is my reward: “Oh,

Lord, I beseech thee, take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jon. 4:3), and to bear my grief and my shame together.

“Ah, Jonas, Jonas,” said God to him, “dost thou think thou hast reason to be angry?” (Jon. 4:4.) Is that the whole cause of thy trouble? What greater consolation could there be for a preacher than to see his hearers shed tears of repentance, amend their lives, and escape the punishment they were threatened with by God? You should rejoice at having done your work so well, but instead of rejoicing you are troubled so much as to desire death! Dost thou think thou hadst just cause for thy anger? There is no doubt, my dear brethren, that Jonas had no reason for sorrow, but rather much reason for joy. His trouble came solely from his own imagination. He thought that the whole city would look upon him as a false prophet who had betrayed the people and made them fast and do penance for nothing; whereas the contrary was really the case.

How many there are who might be asked the same question:

“Dost thou think thou hast reason to be angry?” You, oh, husband, who give way to all sorts of fancies if your wife only turns her head aside, or if she fails to meet you in her usual friendly manner; do you think that you have reason to be angry? You, oh, wife, if your husband, occupied with other cares, appears before you with a stern countenance, or gives you a short answer without meaning any harm, immediately think that his love is growing cold or that he despises, neglects, or hates you; then the two of you go about the whole day, gloomy and ill-tempered, not speaking a word to each other, and tormenting yourselves to such an extent that you can hardly sleep at night, and if the cause of all this trouble is sought for, it will be found to exist merely in the imagination.

II. Others trouble themselves when they should rejoice. Children are the most fruitful cause of unnecessary trouble in the married life. Some people cannot be consoled because they have no children; others, because they have too many; others, again, because their children die young. Let us see, now, whether they have cause for sorrow, and not rather for joy and consolation.

1. First, those who have no children, although they wish very much to have them. It is true that the principal end of the married state is to bring up children in the service of God, and to lead their souls to heaven, that they may praise God and bless him for all eternity. It is true that children, when they are good, are the crown and joy of their parents, and therefore, in the Old Law, unfruitfulness was looked upon as a great misfortune, nay, even a shame and disgrace. How afflicted Anna, the wife of Elcana, was on account of her barrenness! She could not eat or drink; her daily occupation was to weep and sigh because she had no children, so that at last her husband said to her: “Anna, why weepest thou and why dost thou not eat?” (I Kings 1:8). And Rachel, too, how troubled she was. I must have children, she said to her husband, “otherwise I shall die” (Gen. 30:1). Now, although sterility is to be attributed to natural causes, yet it certainly depends on the decrees of God’s providence, and therefore the patriarch Jacob answered the complaints of Rachel by saying:

“Am I as God, who hath deprived thee of the fruit of thy womb?” (Gen. 30:2.)

And meanwhile, I ask all who thus trouble themselves, do you think you have just cause for sorrow? You should rather rejoice, for, in the first place, how many duties, cares, obligations, fears, and anxieties you escape, which fathers and mothers must suffer, precisely because they have children! To say nothing of the inconvenience and discomfort they have to put up with day and night, while their children are still very young. What a great responsibility is theirs if they do not bring up their children in a Christian manner! How great their trouble and anxiety if their children get sick! How deep their affliction if they die! How profound their grief if their children are deprived of their reason, or suffer some other defect! And what a trial it is when they are disobedient, wicked, disrespectful, and obstinate! What care and labor it takes to feed and clothe them decently! See from what God has freed you.

Perhaps you are wealthy, and are therefore sorry that you have no heirs to whom you may leave your possessions. Why should that annoy you? If you wish, you can find heirs enough, to whom it will be far better for you and more useful for your souls to leave your money. There are some birds that rear the young of other birds, as if they were their own; as we know to be the case with hens, that often rear ducklings. How many poor orphans there are who, on the death of their parents, are abandoned by everyone! They have neither money, nor food, nor clothing. It is of them that Jesus Christ has said:

“He that shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me” (Matt. 18:3). Take them into your house, then, or at least into your care; provide for their wants. They will certainly, in their gratitude, look upon you as

their father and mother, and they will be to you as children, to replace those whom you anxiously ask from God. You can adopt as many of them as you wish, and in their persons you can feed and clothe Jesus Christ himself. Do you wish for some one to inherit your property when you die? How many poor people there are here and there, and perhaps in your very neighborhood, who are in want, and may, unknown to others, be without anything to eat, because they, are ashamed to beg! They, too, represent the Person of Jesus Christ. Make them your heirs; you will lose nothing by them, but will gain a great deal. They will make over your property to heaven, so that you will be able to live on it forever. And in that way, too, Jesus Christ will be your heir and inheritance.

2. Just as they who have no children bewail their lot, so, also, they who have a numerous offspring groan under the burden, and complain that they have neither time nor means to bring them up properly. But even you, if you think of the matter sensibly, have more cause for consolation than sorrow. For, with regard to the annoyance and want of time of which you complain, tell me, are you so badly off after all? There is a shopkeeper who must spend the whole day at his business; he is hardly out of bed in the early morning when he hears people knocking at the door, who want to buy something; while he is attending to them, others come, and so it goes from morning to night; customers are constantly coming in; one wants this, another that; his house is always full of people, so that he has hardly time enough to take his meals, and in the evening he is not able to stand for weariness. What do you think of his case? It is truly very hard for the poor man to bear it! But did you ever hear a shopkeeper complain that too many customers come to him? I should think not; for on that his business depends. The more customers he has, the better pleased he is, and although they give him trouble, he is always glad to see them. He looks upon the trouble as nothing, provided he can make more money by it. Christian married people, what is the end and aim of the married state? The principal reason why you have chosen that state is to bring up children in the service of God. That is your principal duty, by performing which you will render a most pleasing service to God and will save your souls; that is your chief business, by which you can gain great glory in heaven for yourselves and your children. So that, if you have many children, are you to be afflicted therefore? Certainly the annoyances, difficulties, and cares of your state will be increased. One child is crying out for something here, another there; one wants this, another that, and the parents often do not know which they are to attend to first. But it is in these very trials that your business consists. The more souls you can bring to heaven, the greater your gain and merit for eternity, and therefore you should rejoice at the good opportunity you have in your numerous offspring. But, you think, it is easy to talk; if there are many children, they will require a good deal of food and clothing, and where is it to come from?

Be satisfied! God, who sends you many to be fed, will also send you food for them, if you manage matters properly. Bring up your children as well as you can; some for a profession, others for an honorable trade or business. Let none of them be idle; where there are many to work, there are many to earn. Only serve God, and put your confidence in him as your heavenly Father, and he who fed the five thousand with a few loaves of bread will not allow you or your children to suffer want, if you are only true to him.

3. The third and last class of married people who trouble themselves without cause, consists of those whose children die young. If the tree puts forth many blossoms, if the vine promises to bear well, we are more grieved when a frost or a hail-storm puts an end to our hopes, than if we had never had any reason to hope, such as would be the case if the fruit tree or the vine perished in mid-winter. Such is also the case with parents: they bewail their misfortune if their children die in the bloom of youth, just at the time when they promised to be a support and comfort to their parents for many years to come, far more than if they had no children at all. Alas, the mother sighs and laments: My only son; what a charming child he was! And now he is dead! My poor little daughter! I loved her most of all my children, and now she is dead, and all my consolation is gone with her! I am almost inclined to despair when I think of it! I shall not forget her as long as I live! Oh, what a trial, what a cross! What misery and affliction! Oh, poor, afflicted people, certainly the hand of God lies heavily upon you! Could there be a greater sorrow upon earth? No, it is impossible that there could be! Weep, therefore, and bewail your misery as much as you please; but if I were looking at you, instead of pitying you, I should be inclined to laugh, or if I had to show pity outwardly it would be, not for your sorrow, but for your folly. Do you think you have cause to afflict yourself so excessively? Excessively, I say, because it is natural, and no parent is to be blamed for it; it is natural to be sorry for the death of a child. But, I ask you again, have you any occasion for such *excessive* sorrow? In truth, if ever there was occasion for consolation and joy, it is this; for in addition

to all the advantages which they have who are without children, they who have a child in heaven have a consolation and joy that the others are without. And must I ask you why you brought into the world that child whose death you deplore? Was it that it might live a long life here below? No, certainly, that would not be enough; its only end was heaven, and your duty, strictly defined for you by the Almighty God, was to lead it there by every means in your power. And you have attained your object; your dear child is where it ought to be, and where you were bound to lead it. And yet you are so overwhelmed with sorrow!

Married Christians, do not torment yourselves by your own fancies where you have no reason to be troubled, much less when you have rather reason to rejoice. The married state brings cares and troubles enough with it; do not make unnecessary cares for yourselves. If you have nothing else to suffer, think that by your unreasonable cares you may force the Almighty to send you some of the real crosses and trials that others have to bear, and then you will have cause enough to mourn and lament. You are like a little child that sits crying at the door, until its mother runs out and asks: What is the matter with you? Who has done anything to you? But the child continues to cry until the mother gets vexed, and at last takes the rod and gives the child a good beating, saying to it: "There, now you have something to cry for." I tell you, therefore, to be careful that God does not act with you in the same way. And now: "Do well and rejoice," and, as St. Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4), in a good conscience, and in a virtuous and Christian life, which will bring you safely from this life to eternal joy. Amen.

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