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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 +++

The Penitent Christian VOLUME 2

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Prayer for Perseverance in Good

“Ask and you shall receive.” St. John 16:24.

I have already spoken to you of different means that we must make use of in order to persevere in good. One of them is to guard the heart from bad thoughts and desires; another, to guard the eyes from dangerous curiosity. But all this will be of little use, if we omit praying to God, or pray but seldom. Learn then,

I. That fervent prayer to God is not only a necessary means to perseverance and salvation for all men; but it is

II. For some, the only means of salvation.

I. “All our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 3:5). We are mortals, who, without the supernatural help and grace of God, are not only incapable of attaining eternal salvation, but cannot even make the least move towards it. Moreover, we are inclined to evil of our own corrupt nature, and are blown hither and thither, like reeds by the wind, by our inordinate appetites and desires, by pride, avarice, anger, impatience, hatred, envy, lust, nay, according to the repeated assertions of the Apostles, we are the bond-slaves of sin; so that, if a man were abandoned to his own natural strength, without the supernatural assistance of God, although retaining the power of free will, he could not (humanly speaking), long refrain from sin. Thus miserable and frail as we are, where do we live? In the midst of a perverse world, the arena, wherein we have to contend, day and night, with countless enemies, who far surpass us in strength and power; in the midst of a thousand temptations and dangers; dangers, from the demons who surround us on all sides, and are unceasingly occupied in trying to bring about our eternal ruin, dangers from men, who lead each other into sin by bad example, by promises, threats, allurements, and flattery; dangers from prosperity, which generally turns away the human heart from God and heavenly things, and fixes it on earthly goods; dangers from adversity, and the many trials of life, which drive men to despair; dangers, at home; dangers, abroad!—Ah, no matter where we turn, we find snares set to entrap us to eternal ruin! Well might each one of us say with Josaphat, when he was surrounded by the enemy on all sides: “As for us, we have not strength enough to be able to resist this multitude, which cometh violently upon us. But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to God” (2 Paralip. 20:12), and humbly implore his assistance. And that is just what God requires of us. God does not wish us to pray to him for the same reason that beggars are forced to ask alms from the rich: namely, to declare their poverty, or to excite pity and commiseration for their needs. No, the all-knowing Lord is better acquainted with our wants than we

are ourselves. “Your Father knoweth what is needful for you,” says Christ, “before you ask him” (St. Matthew 6:8). He knows your miseries before you expose them to him: and he has greater pity for our wretchedness than a good mother has for her sick child. Why, then, is it necessary for us to implore the help of God, if he already knows what we want, if his Fatherly love already inclines him to help us? It is true that God knows already what help and grace we are in need of from him; and that he can give us his grace without our co-operation, if he wishes to do so; but as a general rule, he will not give us any grace, the first alone excepted, unless we humbly ask it of him. God could have caused the fruits of the earth to come forth of themselves; but he does not do so. He requires us to do work, to till the fields, and sow the seed. In the same way he wishes all men to be eternally happy in heaven, and to that end, he is ready to give us all the assistance of his grace in liberal measure, but on the condition that we ask it of him so that we may always humbly acknowledge that he is the sole Lord and Giver of all grace, on whom depends our temporal and spiritual welfare. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you” (St. Matthew 7:7). That is to say, he who asks not, receives nothing; he who seeks not, finds nothing; and he who knocks not at the door of grace, shall find it closed against him. Hence, the Lord repeats again and again to us his exhortation to turn to him. “Cry to me” (Jerem. 33:3). “Let nothing hinder thee from praying always” (Ecclus. 18:22). “Watch ye and pray” (St. Matthew 26:41). “We ought always to pray, and not to faint” (St. Luke 18:1). “Pray without ceasing” (Theses. 5:17) “Watch in prayers” (1 Pet. 4:7). The holy Fathers, explaining the necessity of prayer, compare it to a channel whereby all heavenly gifts and graces flow down on the human soul; to a chain, by which we draw ourselves up to God; to a key, by which we open heaven; to a bulwark, behind which we take refuge from all the assaults of our enemies. Prayer is like food, because we cannot live long without it. It is like air, and is as necessary to us as the air we breathe, nay, as the soul is to the body. Take away from the body its food, its breath, its soul, and what will become of it? So with the soul, if you deprive it of prayer. Not to pray, and still to try to persevere in good; not to pray, and still to desire heaven; not to pray, and still to hope to remain free from sin, is to tempt God, to desire a miracle from him; it is like trying to see without light, to speak without a tongue, to hear without ears, to walk without feet. No one can work out his salvation without the help of God, and no one receives that help, unless he prays. It is a sheer impossibility. It must be evident to all, that it is absolutely impossible to live virtuously without prayer. Therefore, I implore you always to have prayer at hand as your most assured refuge.

II. Prayer is not only a necessary means to salvation, but it is often the *only* means which God has ordained for many. It is the only means for the sinner to bring him to the knowledge of his unhappy state and to true repentance and conversion. If he does not use that means, humbly begging of God the grace of true contrition, no other grace will ever be given him. It is the only means for that man who is in the midst of temptation; and if he does not use it, if he does not cry to God for help, he will certainly fall into sin. It is the only means for that oppressed individual, in order to enable him to bear his crosses and trials with patience and merit for his soul. If he does not use it and earnestly beg of God the grace of patience, he will not receive strength or comfort, and he may even despair. It is the only means for that just man to persevere in the state of grace. If he does not use it, and often cry to God for help, he will be perverted and fall into sin. Job says on the dunghill: “My whole body is a mass of corruption; nothing but lips are left about my teeth” (Job 19:20) as if to say, in the person of the sinner: Everything about me is in a lost and despairing condition; all I have left are my lips and tongue, wherewith to pray to God and implore his grace and mercy! Constant prayer is necessary for a man, if he wishes to save his soul.

Will any one of you say: I cannot keep the commandments? Why not? I ask. You may reply: Christ commands me to love my enemy from my heart, to forgive and forget all the injuries he has inflicted on me, and even to do good to him. Now, I cannot do that; it is impossible. No matter what efforts I make, I cannot drive away the recollection of the injuries that man has inflicted on me. The very sight of him makes the blood rush to my face. I cannot force myself to greet him in a friendly manner, and as to loving and doing him good, it is utterly impossible. What a terrible thing to say! Hear what St. Augustine says. “You are mistaken, my good friend ; God does not command us to do impossible things; but when he lays his commands on us, he exhorts us to fulfill them, as far as we can, and to ask from him help to do what is beyond our power; and then he helps to do it.” There you have the proof of your mistake, or rather of your obstinacy. You do not feel any salutary inclination to forgive injuries and to love your enemy; this grace of God is wanting in you, I grant you that; but

you have another grace, which is never wanting to you. And what is that? The permission to pray, which God has placed in your hands as an instrument by which you may obtain the other grace of loving your enemy, nay, every grace that is necessary and advantageous for your salvation; and you may be infallibly certain that you will receive them, for God has bound himself and given his word, to deny nothing to prayer. Therefore, if you cannot pardon and love your enemy, you can, at all events, pray. Pray then, and you will get that grace as infallibly, as it is certain as that God's promises cannot deceive. If you refuse to do that, then there is no help for you; but you must attribute your misfortune to no one but yourself alone.

Another complains and says: "Ah, would that I were in a different state of life, in which I might serve God and save my *soul* in peace and quiet!" Why do you wish that? "Because I am in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in which there are, every day, so many dangers to be avoided, so many snares to be detected, so many temptations and allurements to be overcome. I cannot save myself from a fall. I sin here, and there, so that I must despair of salvation." Nonsense! God does not command you to do impossibilities. If he has called you to that state, pray, at least (for that you can always do), for grace to fulfill your duties in it and the Lord God, in virtue of his promise, will make it possible for you. If you refuse to do that, there is no help for you.

"I cannot be patient," complains a third. Why not? "Because so many crosses and trials come upon me, one after the other, every day of my life. It is too much, altogether; it is intolerable! I cannot even form a good thought, anxious though I may be to do so; much less, can I resign myself to the will of God with patience. I have no consolation, either from heaven, or earth, from God or man! I am actually driven to despair!" Do not say that! You can be patient if you wish; and if you cannot, you can, at all events, pray for the grace. If you do not cease praying, I assure you, in the name of God, who has promised to deny nothing to fervent prayer, that you will experience spiritual comfort and consolation in your crosses, no matter how heavy they may be.

"I cannot keep from certain sins," says a fourth. Why not? "The bad habit of such a vice has now grown inveterate with me. I cannot withstand the temptations and assaults that are made on me, day and night; they are so violent and impetuous, that I cannot resist them, and must succumb!" What do you mean by that? Does not St. Paul say expressly, that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it"? (I Cor. 10:13). And you, too, can withstand your wicked desires, or any other temptations, no matter how violent they are. If you have not the grace to do so, then, at all events, you can pray for it. But if you refuse to pray and do not appeal to God to help you, then you must not be surprised at your weakness and frailty.

There are non-Catholics, who may allege by way of excuse for their heresy that God did not give them the gift and light of the true faith. I grant that they have not received that gift; but they could have asked God for it; and if they had done so, they would certainly have received it. Are there any such here? To them, I cry out: "Precious, dear souls! You, too, are bought by the blood of Jesus Christ; you are created for heaven as well as I and all men! I would willingly do all in my power to bring you to heaven; but you must know that he that believeth not shall be condemned" (St. Mark 16:16). Reason teaches you, too, that there can be but one true faith; for the God of truth cannot say yes and no to the same article of belief. It cannot be true, for instance, that Jesus Christ instituted seven Sacraments for Catholics, and, only two, or three, for you! otherwise God would be guilty of deception and contradiction, and either your religion or ours would be false. But I do not wish to dispute with you now as to the truth of our respective religions. One request only I make of you: pray, call out to God: My Lord and my God! Thou hast created me for eternal happiness; my only wish and desire is to come to thee in heaven, otherwise it were better for me that I never were born! Now I beg of thee, by the precious Blood that Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour, shed for me, lead me on in the way of salvation! If I am in the right way, already, keep me in it; but if I am in the wrong, then I implore of thee show me the truth, and grant me to embrace it, and save my soul!

Another truth which follows from the foregoing is this: the state of the man who gives up prayer, or who calls on God for help in a slothful and distracted fashion, is a most miserable and desperate one. Why? Because to give up prayer means to neglect the most necessary means of salvation. All other means, good and meritorious works, and even the holy Sacraments themselves, necessary and useful as they always are to our souls, can be supplied in some other way, when there is no opportunity of having recourse to them. If I cannot fast on account of ill health, I can make up for it by alms-giving or other good works. If I have no opportunity of confessing my sins, I can obtain forgiveness for them by an act of perfect contrition. Even if I have not an opportunity of

receiving Baptism, I can make up for it by desire, and by a perfect love of God. But nothing can take the place of prayer. If I refuse to pray, I have nothing on which to ground, with any degree of certainty, my hopes of salvation. Without prayer, in the present disposition of divine Providence, God does not, as a general rule, bestow his graces. Without prayer we cannot receive the grace of repentance, of divine love, of final perseverance and a happy death, in short, eternal salvation. A sinner, no matter how wicked he is, as long as he prays for the grace of conversion and amendment, has not yet lost all hope. But if he goes so far as to lose the spirit of prayer, or not to have an earnest desire that his prayers should be heard, then one might say of him with truth : That man is blinded, hardened, and obstinate in sin. Therefore the penitent David praises and blesses God with a grateful heart: “Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me” (Ps. 65:20), that is to say: Blessed be God, who, after all the sins I have committed, has left me still the love of prayer! Therefore, Christians, whatever we do, let us pray! Whatever good works we neglect, let us not give up prayer. Amen.

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