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Reminder that the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Thursday are Rogation Days in which the Church would have us pray the Litany of the Saints. Ascension Thursday is a Holy Day of Obligation.

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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. III - THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Object of Prayer

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

What is easier than asking? What more agreeable than to receive all you ask for? And he says it who cannot fail to fulfill his promise, for with God to will and to accomplish are one and the same thing. “Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.” “But you ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss” (James 4:3). Some perhaps pray in the state of mortal sin; others are not humble enough when they present their petitions to God; others have not confidence enough; others are not sufficiently in earnest, but are slothful and indifferent in their prayers; others ask for things that are too worthless and vile. All prayers of this kind are not right prayers; therefore you ask, and receive not. I do not intend to speak of all those faults of prayer today, but only on the last which I consider the chief cause of our prayers being fruitless

We pray, and are not heard because the things we ask from God are too vile and worthless.

Prayer is defined in different ways. But all theologians are agreed in calling it an act of religion, a sacrifice by which God is honored. Now, when sacrifice is offered, the gift presented must be worthy of the person to whom it is offered. Cain offered him sacrifice. What did he gain thereby? “To Cain and his offering he had no respect,” says the Scripture. Why? Because the offering was too vile; for Cain had selected the worst of his fruits to offer to God. Nay, all the sacrifices of the Old Law would have been vile in the sight of God, had they not been symbols and figures of that infinite sacrifice which the High-priest Jesus Christ offered of himself on the cross, and still continues to offer daily on our altars in the holy Mass. Prayer is to ask suitable things from God. Thrasilus asked King Anbigoms for a single small piece of money; the king repelled him with indignation, saying: Away with thee, thou shameless fellow, thou hast not asked for a kingly gift. So we should be careful not to ask the almighty God for vile and worthless things.

What wonder is it that so many pray much and receive little? When we look carefully at our prayers, we see that it is only vile and worthless things that we seek from God. What have we hitherto prayed for? We have had some bodily pain to suffer, or were troubled with sadness and mental anxiety, and wished to be freed from it. Some dear friend of ours was grievously ill, and we wished to see him restored to health. Our domestic affairs

were not prospering, and we desired to be more fortunate. We were suffering secretly from poverty, and could not live up to what our standing required. These were the things that drove us to church, made us fall down on our knees and hold up our hands to heaven, with bitter tears and deep sighs; is it really worth while to ask such vile things from the great God, who can give true and spiritual goods, and who offers us what will last forever? Is that the only request you have to make? Away with your begging! You do not ask a royal gift, much less a divine one becoming infinite majesty and generosity. All those temporal things are mere shadows, child's play, that are absolutely nothing in the sight of God. And that is what our Lord remarks to his disciples in today's gospel, when he says to them, as if reproaching them: "Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name." But the two sons of Zebedee had already asked to have the chief places in his kingdom. Peter had asked for permission to build three tabernacles on Mount Tabor. The other Apostles had made many requests. Does not that count for anything? No; "hitherto you have not asked anything." Their requests were only for temporal things, and those I do not regard as of any value. If you pray, ask for great things; ask for eternal and not for transitory things; do not pray for money, which is rust, or for possessions, which are earth. God will not hear you, unless you ask him for what he thinks worthy of his generosity.

What did the Son of God think of temporal goods? He did not think it worth while to look at them even from a distance. If riches, honors, prosperity, sensual joys and pleasures had seemed great goods in his sight, he would certainly have valued them and made choice of them; for he is the Eternal Wisdom and must appreciate all things at their true value. So that, if we Christians value temporal goods so highly, and ask for them so earnestly and constantly in prayer, does it not seem as if we wished to accuse our Lord of not knowing how good they are? Is it not a sign of great ignorance in us to make so much of that in which the Lord could find no good? And remember that our prayer; to be efficacious, must be offered in his name; "If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you." But how can we ask in the name of Jesus Christ when we pray for things that he has taught us to despise, or when we ask to be freed from things in which he has taught us to seek for happiness? Earthly goods are called by him "the deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22); but trials he calls beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn" (Matt. 5:3, 5) and he says that he will not look on us as his disciples unless we at least detach our hearts from all earthly goods: "Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33) If, then, we ask for temporal goods, can we appeal to the name and authority of Jesus Christ with his heavenly Father, and expect him to bestow on us such vain things that both God himself and the Son of God consider as worthless? Plutarch tells us that Alexander the Great gave to Perillus the sum of fifty talents. Perillus, out of politeness, excused himself from accepting such a large sum, and said that ten talents would be quite enough. "What! Exclaimed Alexander: "It might be enough for you to receive, but not for me to give; you should remember that I am a king." In the same way, I imagine, God speaks to the Christian who prays earnestly for temporal goods. It would be enough for you, a miser, if I were to fill your coffers with money, your barns with corn, your cellars with wine; but it is not enough for me to give. For you, an ambitious man, it would be enough if I were to give you a great name before the world; but it is not enough for me to give. It might satisfy you, a vain child of the world, if I were to give you a long, comfortable, and pleasant life; then, indeed, you would imagine you had a heaven on earth, and trouble yourself little about my eternal heaven; but that would not be enough for me to give. Gold I look on as dross, honor as an empty breath, sensual pleasure as poison, and a long life as a protracted imprisonment. To bestow such things as those is unbecoming my infinite majesty and sovereignty, my infinite wisdom and holiness, and is not at all enough for my infinite generosity. Therefore, if you want nothing but such trash, you may go away; I will not hear your prayers.

Therefore, when you pray, ask for great things, for eternal, not for transitory things. Ask for supernatural, true, and heavenly goods, for the precious gifts of his heavenly grace, for pardon of your sins, amendment of your life, purity of conscience, zeal in the divine service, and constant virtue; these are goods that do not cease with this life. They are the wares that God offers to sell you without money, and to bestow on you without measure, if you only desire them. Truly, not without reason was the Lord angry with the Israelites of old. He rained down bread on them from heaven, in which they could find all possible delights of taste, and yet they longed for the flesh-pots and garlic of Egypt, which they had when they were groaning under the yoke of Pharaoh. Christians, God has prepared a heavenly food for us; but we sigh and long for the garlic of the world. Our desires are fixed on earthly things; our thoughts always revert to them; we labor and fatigue ourselves for the sake of them; while

we feel nothing but nausea and disgust for the heavenly and eternal goods. God does not act contrary to his promise when he refuses such paltry things to our prayers. Not that earthly things are really nothing but when we make them the objects of our desires, they are as nothing compared to eternal life. It is neither wrong nor unlawful to ask God for temporal prosperity, health, good fortune, for God wishes that we should pray to him for those things, since by such a prayer we honor him, and acknowledge ourselves to be his creatures who are always in want of him. If you wish to pray for temporal things, then observe at least the order fixed by Christ in the Lord's Prayer, in which the first petitions are "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" in the fourth place comes the petition for our daily bread, while last of all we pray to be delivered from evil. "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33), namely, the things that pertain to your temporal well-being.

Let no one, then, be surprised if his prayers are frequently not heard; for he has not observed the proper order; he has given the first place to worthless, paltry things; he has set more value on earth than on heaven; his bodily welfare has wrung from him more sighs and tears than the salvation of his soul. He is acting like king Jeroboam, who stretched forth his hand against a prophet in spite of the threats of divine vengeance that were pronounced against him; but his temerity was punished on spot, for his hand withered up immediately. Hardly had he felt the effects of the divine anger, when he turned to the prophet and begged of him to pray to God for him; but for what? Entreat the face of the Lord the God, and pray for me that my hand may be restored to me" (3. Kings 13:4). See how foolishly this king acts; he is troubled and concerned on account of his hand but he thinks nothing of the harm done his soul. How do we act, my dear brethren, when by divine decree some misfortune happens to us or those belonging to us, in our bodily well-being or in our temporal affairs? We moan and lament; we complain of the hard times, of the sickness that we suffer from; we run to the priests; we have Masses said. Pray for me, we cry out, that I may recover my health; that the losses I have sustained may be made good. But we hardly bestow a thought on our souls; their welfare is what troubles us least, what gives us least concern. But we are totally wrong in the whole matter. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice," that is the most important all. Pray, have Masses said, fast, give alms, that your sins may be forgiven, that you may be patient under adversity, that you may despise the world, that you may practice the Christian virtues, that you may be always resigned to the will of God, and may always have the grace to do his holy will.

Nor must the reason of our asking those things be any other than the attainment of our last end. Our principal reason for desiring them should be that we may make them conducive to the glory of God, and our own eternal welfare. How criminal, it would be to make sin subservient to their attainment. We should not even ask for such delusive possessions but with a degree of apprehension, lest they should prove the cause of our spiritual ruin. When you pray for the things of this world, leave the granting or refusing of your request to God, the physician of your soul, who knows best how to distinguish the medicine from the poison. In short in this regard adhere firmly to the rule of Christ: seek ye, first, the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all those (temporal) things shall be added unto you, as far as they may be subordinate to your own eternal welfare. Amen.

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