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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

Sixth Sunday after Easter

Avoiding Bad and Dangerous Company

*"These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized."* St. John 16:1

Those parts of the body that especially scandalize the soul, or lead it into sin, are the eyes, the hands, and the feet. "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee" (St. Matthew 18:9), that its dangerous glances may not lead you into sin. "If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee," the former by dangerous touches, the latter by leading you into the danger of sin, "cut it off and cast it from thee" (St. Matthew 18:8). Therefore, I say that to persevere in divine grace, we especially guard against

- I. *Bad company*, and
- II. *Dangerous company*.

I. Man above all other creatures, is an imitative animal. This, we daily remark in little children, whose sole occupation is, generally speaking, the imitation of others. Indeed, if we duly consider the matter, many kinds of art, which are highly esteemed in the world, are hardly anything else but imitations. Painters, sculptors, engravers, musicians, employ their greatest skill in imitating nature, and in representing each subject as it is created by God. Actors, imitate as closely as possible the persons of kings, peasants, soldiers, and beggars, representing the different passions of anger, love, grief, joy, and so on. And what are the manners, customs, fashions and speech of mankind but imitations, by which each man follows his neighbor's example, and behaves exactly as he sees others behaving? Hence, the philosopher Aristotle remarks: "It is natural to men from their childhood to imitate others, and in that way they differ from other animals." This consideration and also the fact that our nature has been corrupted by the sin of our first parents, is the basis of the proposition I have undertaken to prove: namely, that he who deliberately frequents bad company cannot long remain good and holy. If we were all so constituted as to be ready to imitate the good qualities we see or hear of in others, things would be different. It would then be a desirable thing for the good to mix with the wicked; nor would the pious be corrupted by bad example, as the wicked would rather learn from the good. "With the holy thou wilt be holy, and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent, and with the elect thou wilt be elect; and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted" (Ps. 17:26, 27). "He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled with it;" and he that hath fellowship with the proud, shall put on pride (Ecclus. 13:1).

One bad companion is often more than enough to corrupt and lead astray a number of people. Have you ever heard that a scabby sheep became sound by going with healthy sheep? No; but if the shepherd does not separate it from the flock at once, it will infect all the others. Mix rotten apples with good ones, and in a short time, the whole lot will get bad; twenty good apples will become bad, if one rotten one is put amongst them. The cele-

brated statue that king Nabuchodonosor saw in his dream, the head of which was of gold, the shoulders and breast of silver, the body of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet part of iron and part of clay, fell to the ground shattered in pieces, so that it became dust and was blown away by the wind. What was it that destroyed such a great statue? A single stone that fell from the mountain on its feet. Suppose that in a family the head is of pure gold, namely, the father is pure as gold as to his conduct and life; the mother is refined as silver; the children as modest and reserved as brass; the servants, by their industry and diligence; as strong and faithful as iron. Lo! one stone of scandal, thrown among them, is enough to destroy the whole beautiful statue. A wicked servant comes into a family the members of which lead holy lives; an immoral companion finds his way in; the children are intrusted to some devil's teacher for their education. Alas, that is quite enough to shatter to pieces the beautiful gold, silver, and brass, to ruin the morals and destroy the harmony of that family, and change its virtue into vice! "Know you not," says St. Paul, "that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump?" (I Cor. 5:6.) A married woman who is too free in her conduct, and is not sufficiently observant of the fidelity she owes her husband, is a source of scandal to a whole neighborhood. A badly reared, corrupt child can infect a whole school by his bad example; a bold, vain worldling, dressed in an immodest fashion, casts a stone of scandal into the eyes and hearts of a whole town. Now, if one wicked person can do so much harm, and influence the thoughtless to follow his bad example, what will he not have to fear who recklessly goes into bad company and does not care with whom he associates?

And what will become of those children who are not sufficiently looked after; who are allowed to run about the streets all day and part of the night, with low companions; who have permission to go where they wish, to speak and play with whom they please; whose parents trouble their heads little about what servants they have, as long as the work of the house is done, and who allow their children to be on intimate terms with the servants? Is it any wonder that, with such bad companions around them, the children are instructed in wickedness from their very cradles? Ah, Christian parents, look after your children carefully in this particular, if you wish them to be eternally happy in heaven. Take pattern by the pious Sara. She once saw her son, the little Isaac, playing with the son of her handmaid Agar, who was certainly not well brought up. Filled with a holy jealousy: "Cast out this bond-woman and her son", she cried out to Abraham; otherwise your son Isaac cannot remain good. Cast out, not only the dissolute child, but his mother also; the evil must be torn up by the roots. Christian father! out of the house with that servant, that maid, from whom your children can neither see, hear, nor learn anything good! Away with all young men from whom your daughters can expect nothing but sentimental folly, or still worse, the breathings of sensual passion, even if they are of decent families, nay, even if they are of your own blood-relations.

And all of you, without exception, fly bad company, if you expect to remain good and holy. "Depart from the tents of these wicked men," such was the warning given by Moses to the Israelites, and which God now gives to all of us, "and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be involved in their sins" (Num. 16:26). And not only must we flee company that is actually bad, in which attempts are openly made to lead us astray by talk and conversation, by advice and teaching, by flattery and caresses, and in which a bad example of vindictiveness, injustice, drunkenness, impurity or other vice is given us, but we must also shun

## II. Dangerous company.

By dangerous company, I mean that in which one is likely to commit sin, at least in thought. Such company must, as far as possible, be avoided by those who are anxious to save their souls; for, according to the words of the Holy Ghost, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it" (Ecclus. 3:27). He who goes unnecessarily into danger, or who loves it, will certainly fall into sin. For instance, he who frequents ale-houses or drinking-saloons, although he may not have had any bad intention at first, soon places his soul in danger. In such places are sure to be found certain reckless characters who drink to excess, detract from their neighbor's fair fame, curse and swear, or indulge in immodest buffoonery and unchaste discourses and songs. And even if there were no danger of the kind, yet we should be deterred from going to such houses by the fear of contracting intemperate habits.

Again, dangerous company for all is the too free and unrestricted intercourse with persons of the opposite sex. I am speaking now merely of those who seek such company without reasonable cause, and solely because they like it, and who make it an occasion of laughing, joking, and otherwise amusing themselves. Who can doubt that there is danger in such company? Every one will say that we are likely to have rain, when the air

feels damp, the sky is covered with dark clouds, and the wind comes from the West. All agree that a long-continued fever is a dangerous illness for a weak, wasted body. And even if the rain does not fall, nor the sick man die, yet the danger of rain or of death has been evident enough; for the danger of an evil consists in the combination of those circumstances from which the evil is likely to follow and does often follow. Now, when two or more people of different sexes are together (and that is like putting fire and straw together), with the intention of amusing one another, and doing their best to make themselves mutually agreeable, laughing and joking to their hearts' content, without any restraint upon their eyes, their tongues, their ears, or their limbs, are not all such in evident danger of sin?

But, among decent people (you urge), there cannot be danger of anything wrong being committed! There is no danger of anything outwardly wrong being done; I grant, that may be. But that there is no danger of anything wrong being done in thought and desire; that I deny altogether. Not without reason does God admonish us to be most careful in this respect: "Sit not at all with another man's wife" (Ecclus. 9:12). When necessity does not require it, you must not even sit beside a person of the opposite sex and the reason is given in the same chapter: "Many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire. Many, by admiring the beauty of another man's wife, have become reprobate; for her conversation burneth as a fire" Ah, how many have been perverted in that way! Hear what St. Augustine says in reference to occasions that some in his presence were maintaining to be of small account and not very dangerous. Laying his hand on his bosom, as if he wished to confirm by an oath the truth of his words, he said: "Believe me, I have seen the cedars of Lebanon, men who were more firmly rooted in virtue, and whose minds were raised higher towards heaven, than the loftiest cedars I have seen them fall to the ground in such occasions and company, so that I wondered at it no less, nor was less terrified by it, than if I had beheld a St. Jerome falling from the height of his sanctity and becoming a public sinner, or a St. Ambrose denying the faith." In the Lives of the Saints we read of men who were models of holiness, men of great perfection and of long-tried virtue, who lived apart from the world in convents or deserts, spending their time in works of penance and mortification, till their bodily strength was exhausted; veterans, who, after having long fought under the standard of Jesus Christ, at last fell into the most shameful crimes. And who was able to make them fall like that? The devil cannot boast of doing it in his own person. For years, he had made war on them; he had appeared to them in the shape of fierce lions, of swine, and of oxen, and beaten them till they were half dead; but he was not able to conquer them. The cause of their ruin was a woman, with whom they at first began a holy conversation, and then committed sin. O dangerous company! which can pervert even a heroic saint, and turn the brightest stars of the heavens into fire-brands of hell! And yet people think so lightly of it nowadays! it is even sought for expressly, and made a matter of previous arrangement; while the impure thoughts and desires that arise in such company are not even made matter of confession, since people deceive themselves by imagining that they did not consent to those thoughts. What! Not consent to them? Did you not voluntarily occasion the cause from which such thoughts arise?

Christians, he that loveth danger shall perish in it; such is my conclusion in the words of the Holy Ghost. Thinking of this, let us carefully avoid dangerous company, and not venture into it unless we are compelled by necessity, or by our position or duty. Especially, must we shun that company in which we know by experience that our hearts will be turned away from heaven and let to grovel in the mire of earth. If even when alone, we cannot sometimes avoid temptation, why should we wantonly seek the occasion of many temptations? Ah, each one of us, must acknowledge with Thomas a Kempis: "As often as I went amongst men, I returned less a man." Therefore, if solitude becomes tedious to me, if I find it hard to keep away from dangerously delightful company, I will think: If it is now so hard for me to remain alone a short time, what will it be hereafter, when I shall have to spend eternity in the flames of hell, surrounded by demons? To avoid that terrible company, should any present difficulty or weariness seem too great? Let us reflect in our meditations on that beautiful heaven wherein we hope to live forever in the society of the Angels and Saints, eternally praising God! Let us say with St. Paul: "But our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory" (Phil. 3:20, 21), so that, with glorified bodies and illumined by the light of glory, we may rejoice with the elect for all eternity. Amen.

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