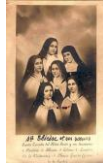




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JMJ

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  
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

### Reflection in the Actual Selection of a State of Life

*“These things I have told you, that when the hour shall come, you may remember that I told you of them.”* St. John 16:4.

Christ applies these words to you today, Christian sons and daughters! Wherefore, this much having been said concerning the different states of life and their difficulties, as well as their obligations, let it suffice for your instructions that when the time will come for choosing a certain state you may remember his words and ponder well on the subject beforehand, nor proceed blindly in an affair of such moment. Let us suppose, now, that the time has come for some to deliberate on the selection of a state of life. What shall I do? they think. Which one shall I choose from the number already described to me?

*I. When actually choosing a state, you must consider whether and how the state you are about to select will help you to your last end.*

*II. You must consider whether and how that state is in accordance with the divine will.*

I. The universal and only end and object that every man must first propose to himself, is *to serve God*, to place his soul in safety, and to gain eternal happiness. With regard to this, there is no need of reflection or deliberation as to whether I wish to gain this end or not; for that must be, once for all, firmly fixed and determined on: *I will serve God, I will save my soul, I will be eternally happy*. My only consideration must be: What are the ways and means by which I shall best attain that end? When a doctor undertakes to cure a sick man he does not consider whether he wishes to cure him or not, for that is his duty and the object of his skill; his only consideration is, what medicines shall he make use of in order to effect a speedy cure. The ways and means to attain our end is a certain state of life in which we intend to serve God and save our souls. Now, if there were only one state in which we could gain eternal happiness, there would be no further need of deliberation, because every one should then embrace the same state. Now, since there are many different ways in which man can attain his last end, that is, since there are many different states of life in which he can serve God and save his soul, his first thought and consideration must be directed to finding out the state he intends selecting for that purpose. And since eternal happiness or misery depends on it, he who wishes to act prudently must look out for a state in which he can best perform that all-important duty of serving God and saving his

soul. Whether the medicine is cheap or costly in itself, sweet or bitter, agreeable or not, makes no matter to the doctor who prescribes it, nor to the sick man who has to take it: the question is whether the medicine has power to restore the sick man thoroughly to health. If I gave to a man suffering from fever a glass of wine, excellent in color, taste, and flavor, the thirsty man would have a great desire to drink it, but it would increase his fever and make him worse; and if I held in the other hand a glass of bitter, ill-smelling medicine, the very sight of it would make the poor man shudder, but it has the power of cooling down the fever and restoring health. Which do you think ought the sick man to choose? Certainly, if he acted prudently and wished to save his life, he would let the wine alone and would drink up the glass of medicine, although he dislikes it. And why so? The wine is better and more agreeable. That is true, but the medicine, bitter as it is, is more profitable for him and more able to help him to attain his end, the recovery of his health. The same thing holds good in the deliberation and choice of a state of life. Our last end must always be the first thing in our thoughts. Whatever state seems to us best suited to that is the best and safest for us, and consequently it must be selected by every one who wishes to act prudently and save his soul.

Having thus far considered the matter, have I done enough, and can I make my choice at once? For instance, after full deliberation, I find that the Religious life in this or that well-ordered convent is the surest means of serving God and going to heaven. Must I, then, at once come to a conclusion, without further reflection, and say: I will become a Religious? By no means; I have not reflected half enough yet. And what more is there to do? I must see whether the Religious life in a convent is better and more helpful for me and for my nature, to the service of God and the salvation of my soul; for what is good for one man is often bad for another, although both have the same end in view. There are different states of life, just as there are different kinds of food. No matter how good, savory, and agreeable a certain article of diet may be, it will not suit every stomach; what is good for one may be very injurious to another. He who has a weak stomach is more benefited by a glass of good wine and by well-cooked food, than by all the doctor's medicine; while one who suffers from fever would find the good wine and cooking highly injurious to him. In the same way, the same state of life is not suited for all Christians.

Besides, I must see whether I have strength enough for that state of life, whether I have talents and ability enough to undergo the duties of it, and do what the rules of the Order require.

I must see whether I have courage enough to endure its difficulties and trials, and whether I have the means and opportunities of embracing that state which will best lead me to my last end. Such is the warning that Christ gives by a simile: "Which of you, having a mind to build a tower, doth not first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he have wherewithal to finish it?" (St. Luke 16:28.) The Gospel says of Peter that, when he saw the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Thabor, "not knowing what he said," what did he say? "Let us make three tabernacles" (St. Luke 9:33). What are you thinking of, Peter? Will you attempt to do what you have never learned? You have learned only how to make nets, and now you wish to build a tabernacle? It is certainly a mistake for a man to undertake a duty for which he has neither ability nor knowledge. The same may be said of many thoughtless sons and daughters, when they are choosing a state of life; for the very first idea that comes into their minds, the first opportunity that offers, whether for marriage, or for the Religious life, they blindly seize upon, and make up their minds at once, without thinking what sort of a state it is, and whether they can fulfill its duties or not. Afterwards, when it is too late, they repent of their thoughtless determination, or they suffer from continual discontent and live in a continual martyrdom; or, if possible, they abandon that state altogether. They did not know what they were doing. They began the building without reckoning the expense, and they are unable to finish it. They tried to build a tabernacle for themselves without having learned the art of building. From this many parents can learn how far more grievously they sin against God and against their children's salvation when they usurp the office of the Almighty, and appoint certain states for their children—the priesthood for the son, a convent for one daughter, marriage for another; and thus they predestine their children and spare neither advice nor exhortations, threats nor caresses, until the latter accept this vocation from them and follow it. Nor does it make any matter to them whether their children have the necessary talents or not for the Religious life or the married state.

Suppose, now, that I know this or that state to be one in which I can more surely attain my last end, serve God, and save my soul; that I have enough strength, gifts, ability, and courage for it, and that I have the means

of embracing that state, so that for me and for my nature it would be the means of more surely attaining my last end; can I, then, at last determine and make a final choice? Certainly you have done a great deal, but you have not yet done all. You have still the most important thing to consider, and that is whether that state of life is the one appointed for you by the will of God.

The perfection and merit of a good work, or of a pious practice, does not consist so much in the excellence and holiness of the work itself, as in its conformity with the will of God; in this, namely, that God wishes me to do or omit that work at a certain time, or in a certain place. For instance, it is certainly a far more holy and meritorious work to go to church to pray or to hear Mass than to sit idly at home. Yet if I am so weak and delicate that the doctor orders me to stay at home, even on Easter Sunday, do I not perform a far more meritorious work, and one far more pleasing to God, by sitting at home than by going to church and hearing even ten Masses? And why? Because at that particular time God wishes me to do the one thing, and not the other. The same holds good for all pious practices. St. Paul the Hermit rendered a pleasing service to God by living alone, fasting, watching, and praying in the desert. If he had spent his time going about the world preaching and converting sinners, which is a far more meritorious work in itself, he would probably not have pleased God so well. On the other hand, the great apostle St. Paul rendered a most pleasing service to God by preaching the Gospel to the heathens. If he had lived in the desert he would not have pleased God so well, for he says himself: "Woe is unto me, if I preach not!" (I Cor. 9:16.) Whence comes this difference? From this alone, that God wished one kind of service from one Paul, and a different kind from the other.

In the same way, my salvation does not consist so much in the holiness and perfection of my state, or in the assurance of salvation which it seems to give me, as in its conformity with the will of God; namely, in this, that God wills me to serve him in any or every state, although he earnestly desires the salvation of all; but he has decreed to bring men to heaven in different ways. The reason of this is, that the means of attaining our last end are profitable to us, in so far as they bring us where God wishes us to be. Another reason, too, is that since the divine goodness gives every man, who chooses the state pleasing to God, powerful graces to fulfill the duties of that state, if I enter a state against his will God is, so to speak, not bound to give me strength to bear a burden that he has not placed on my shoulders. You may see from this that no matter how holy a state one may select, it is not the best state for him unless it is in conformity with the will of God.

In this matter each one must consult the Father of light, who alone knows what his will is in all circumstances; and here we come back to the first point again, namely, that in the deliberation on and choice of a state of life we must consult God, and God alone. If any one asks me: How am I to consult God, that he will make his will known to me? I will answer in the words of Christ: "Ask, and you shall receive" (St. John 16:24).

Ask for light, and God will certainly give it to you, for he cannot break his word. After having humbly confessed your sins, so that you may be in the state of grace, and capable and worthy of receiving the divine inspirations, "for wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins" (Wisdom 1:4), pray humbly to your God, whom you have within you during holy Communion, and place yourself in complete indifference at his disposal, between the three states, suppressing all inclination for one more than another, with the sincere desire of selecting whichever one of them is most pleasing to him. Say to him with childlike confidence: Lead me on the way and to the state in which thou wishest me to serve thee.

Imagine that you are on your deathbed, and about to go into eternity. Do now what you would then wish to have done in choosing a state of life. Think that you are standing before the judgment seat of Christ, and that he is about to demand an account from you of your choice of a state of life; what answer would you like to make him? Would it not be a consolation for you to be able to say to him: Lord, I have done what I could. Thou knowest that I placed myself at thy disposal long before; thou knowest that I have often prayed to thee to tell me what to do, and that I entered that state in thy name, with no other object but to serve thy divine majesty and to be happy with thee. If I have erred in my choice, the fault is not mine.

What advice can be given to those who entered on their state of life without consulting God, as is the case with a great number of Christians, or who even entered on their state against the divine will, and who can easily see from circumstances that they are not as God wills them to be, although it is now too late to change? Must such people despair of salvation? By no means. I ask the first, have you hitherto led a good and Christian life, according to your state, and lived contentedly and peacefully, although sometimes you have committed faults

through human frailty? If such is the case, you may comfort yourselves with the assurance that divine Providence has so ordained it and has led you to this state. All the more reason have you, therefore, to thank the good God for having in his mercy bestowed on you what you should have asked him for. If you are, on the other hand, discontented in your state of life, and if you do not live therein according to the divine law, then I say to you: What does a sailor do who is driven away by a contrary wind with all sails set, and who cannot come back? Does he fall into despair? No, he tries to regain by the oars what he lost through the wind. It costs him a good deal of labor, but in the end, and after many difficulties, he arrives in port. In the same way you must act if you wish to reach the city of eternal happiness, the heavenly Jerusalem. You began your voyage with a contrary wind, when you chose a state of life without vocation. Others who consulted him, and followed his voice, are sailing toward their port with a fair wind, while you must labor at the oars. Therefore you must work on with all the greater diligence, constantly overcoming and mortifying yourself, redoubling your prayers and good works, so that you may truly repent of your error, replace what was wanting in your vocation, and daily implore the mercy of God to help you to accomplish your toilsome journey.

Christian sons and daughters, avoid that error in the way I have pointed out to you; let not the ship leave the shore until the wind is fair, until a divine vocation fills the sails. Begin not your journey in doubt, nor before you have asked the true guide, the Holy Ghost, what road will lead you into the promised land, so that you may, without any mistake, reach your last end, and rejoice forever in heaven with God, who called you; a blessing I wish you from all my heart. Amen.

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