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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. 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Hope of the Just to Attain Eternal Happiness, Although They Have Formerly Committed Grievous Sins

*"Charity covereth a multitude of sins."* 1 Peter 4:8.

Penitent sinners! What a consolation for you! Have you confessed your sins with due sorrow? Do you love your God with your whole heart for His own sake? Are you determined to serve Him in future? Then rejoice in the Lord! You are again on the right way to heaven; you are again, as you were before, children and dear friends of God, and you have nothing to fear on the way of salvation on account of your past sins. Presumptuous sinners, who seem to think that all you need do is to confess your sins at Easter, and then sin away again as recklessly as before, I do not address you to-day! You do not belong to the number of true penitents! Half-hearted Christians! Vain children of the world, who, after having committed and confessed many mortal sins, still continue to live according to the world and the lusts of the flesh, and neglect the divine law as of no consequence, I do not speak to you either; for you do not belong to the number of true penitents! My words are only for those anxious, timid souls, who dread even the danger of sin; who love God with their whole hearts, and do His will in all circumstances; who regret that they cannot love God enough, and are discouraged and frightened when they remember their former sins, although they have often repented of them and amended their lives. To these I say:

*You have no cause to give way to a cowardly fear on the way to heaven on account of your former sins, many and grievous though they be, if you have sincerely repented of them.*

God does not act towards the sinner as he deserves, but shows love to him, even while he is in sin. Nay, He shows him, so to speak, a more tender love and goodness, precisely because he is a sinner, because he is one whom he has lost out of the number of His children. We have a figure of this in the meek David, who had to fly when driven from his throne by his rebellious son Absalom. The wickedness and ingratitude of Absalom could not have been greater; neither could the love and tenderness shown him by David, who was indeed forced, in order to save his life, to take up arms against his undutiful, wicked son; but how careful he was in commanding his generals and soldiers to spare his son's life, and not to do him any harm. What else does this rebellious son represent but the sinner who dares to rise up against his heavenly Father by disobedience? Truly, there is no wickedness in the conduct of Absalom that is not to be found in the rebellion of him who dares to despise the commandments of his God. But if the sinner is as presumptuous as Absalom, God is not less good and forgiving

than the meek David. It seems to me that I hear the Lord crying out to those who attempt our lives: Save me my child; do not harm the poor man; leave him still alive, lest he should perish forever!

I. From this we must conclude: to have sinned, to have sinned grievously, to have sinned often, is no reason for doubting the goodness of God, but should rather be a motive to urge us all the more to a sure and certain hope, even if we are actually in sin, provided we have the earnest will to repent truly. For why otherwise should He so eagerly call on the sinner to return to Him, so patiently and with such long-suffering await him, if He were not willing to admit him to mercy? Does He not go after him for years, touching and disturbing his conscience, reminding him of his evil plight, calling and crying out to him, beseeching and entreating him to return, as if he could not exist without him and his friendship? "Return to me and I will receive thee" (Is. 3:12). You shall be as you were before.

Even His threats are a proof that He wishes to pardon the sinner. If I see an angry man standing over his prostrate foe with arms in his hands, oh! I should say at once, there is no chance for that wretch; he is bound to lose his life! But meanwhile I can hear nothing but angry words; the victor brandishes his sword and threatens and reviles his adversary; ah, I think, that man is not minded to slay his enemy; otherwise he would not have waited so long, for he might have spared his threats, since he has his foe at his mercy. Such, too, are my thoughts about the Almighty God. To complain of the sinner, to upbraid him with his shameful deeds, to threaten him with the fire of hell, to brandish the drawn sword over his head, although in all places and times he has him completely in his power: that is not punishing, or inflicting the fatal blow, or rejecting and reprobating; it is rather giving time for repentance, inviting, and, as it were, compelling to return. In a word, all this is a sign of mercy and compassion; to me it seems like the conduct of a loving father, who sometimes appears to be in a terrible passion with his son who has offended him, and whom he seeks everywhere, although he knows the delinquent to be hidden in a corner; still he pretends not to see him, and goes about the room crying out: Where is the rascal? I will flog him till the blood comes! Meanwhile the son keeps as still as possible and trembles with fear, thinking how he may afterwards appease his father's anger. So does God act. He threatens as if He were minded to destroy the sinner at once and condemn him to hell, but in reality He only wishes to inspire him with a salutary fear, and by that fear to drive him to ask for pardon. So He acted with our forefather immediately after the first sin: "Where art thou?" He cried out in angry tones throughout paradise. But, oh, great God! says St. Chrysostom; thou askest where he is? Dost thou not know that he is hidden amidst the trees? Truly, He knew it well, and yet He does not cease crying out: "Where art thou?" until at last Adam crept humbly forth from his hiding-place and acknowledged his guilt; and at once, instead of punishing him with eternal death, the Lord comforted him with the promise of a Redeemer.

2. From this I draw another conclusion: to have sinned, grievously and often, is not a reason to despair, but rather to hope all the more in the mercy of God for a sinner who returns and does penance; for will He who has such a tender love for the sinner, who calls him so earnestly, who awaits him so patiently, while he is still flying from God and in the act of rebellion and of sin, will God, I ask, reject, abandon, thrust from Him the sinner who returns and asks for mercy, and promises to amend? Your sins, oh, man! are many in number, grievous in malice; for years and years you have wallowed in filth; be it so. But are your sins more hateful to God now that you detest them and bewail them, and fear the divine anger, than they were formerly, when you loved them more than you loved your God, and while you were despising his goodness? Formerly you transgressed His commandments with full deliberation, and with all the freedom of your wicked will; yet He continued to love you, to seek after you, to await you, to do good to you, even without your knowledge or gratitude; will He then cease to love you only when He beholds you humbly prostrate at His feet? Must His only thought now be to punish you, to reject you, to cast you off from Him? How can that be possible? That would indeed give us the idea of a stern, unjust God, who loves a man while he sins and rejects him when he repents.

Oh, no, you cannot as quickly resolve to do penance, even in desire, as God is ready and willing to receive you, nay, to meet you with His grace. He seems "in a greater hurry to grant pardon than the sinner to receive it." David was an adulterer, a murderer, a scandal to the whole kingdom; Achab was a persecutor of the Prophets, an unjust man, an idolater; Manasses was a monster of vice of all kinds: of impurity, cruelty, sorcery, who caused his own children to be burnt as an offering to the devil. It was with a humble sigh that Manasses while in prison implored the divine mercy; Achab put on a hair-shirt; David acknowledged his ingratitude with a contrite word: "I have sinned against the Lord." And behold, that was enough for the merciful God to induce Him to receive

the first, to defer the chastisement of the second, and to forgive the third all his sins. Read how Jesus Christ has acted; He who says of Himself: "I am not come to call the just, but sinners" (St. Matthew 11:13). Publicans, notorious sinners, adulterers, unjust, usurers, and the like were those by whom He was always surrounded. "Now the publicans and sinners drew near unto Him to hear Him," so that the scribes and Pharisees, who could find nothing else to say against Him, called Him by what they thought the disgraceful name of patron and protector of sinners: "And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Read how He acted toward the notorious Magdalene, the usurer Zachaus, the woman taken in adultery, the thief on the cross; read only the parable of the prodigal son; see how he was received by his father.

Consider all this, and you will be obliged to acknowledge and confess with penitent David: "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plentiful redemption." You will be compelled to acknowledge that if God is so good to Him who is actually in sin, if He is so loving to the sinner who intends to repent, if He receives so joyfully the sinner who returns to Him, if He promises heaven and actually gives it to the sinner who repents even at the last moment: what will not that soul have to hope for from Him, when it has long ago bewailed its past misdeeds, and has been trying for some time past to serve God with all possible zeal? Will the divine heart be less loving to such a soul because it has proved its fidelity for a longer time? Will the gate of heaven be closed more tightly, the gates of hell be more to be dreaded than in the case of the sinner? But who can believe that? For then a penitent and now just man, who is of good will, would be worse off than the sinner, who is still careless of his salvation, and has only the intention of repenting. Then we should have good reason for doubting the truth of what the God of truth has said: "If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all My commandments... Living he shall live, and shall not die;" his former wicked life shall not harm him in the least: "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him" (Ezech. 33:12).

Why should penitent Christians, who now serve the Lord, give way to fear, anxiety, and faintheartedness? Do those timid souls, who are always melancholy, sad in thought, and never dare to have a firm hope of heaven, on account of the many sins they have committed in the past, do they perhaps think that they thus please God, or perform a meritorious work, or practice humility? If so, they are greatly mistaken. It is one thing to be humble and have a lowly opinion of one's self before God, and another to be excessively troubled regarding one's salvation, and to mistrust the goodness of God. When the prodigal son returned repentant to his father, and sighed forth: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son," his father, without the least word of reproof, fell on his neck, embraced him most heartily, led him into the house with joy and gladness, clothed him with new garments, prepared a great feast for him, invited his friends to rejoice with him and make merry on account of his son that was lost and had returned again. Now, if while the family was thus rejoicing, the son sat there sad and melancholy, and refused to be comforted; or if he afterwards imagined that he had cause to be afraid, and anxious lest his father might still be angry with him, and therefore he did not dare to address him with due childlike confidence: do you think, I ask, that such conduct would be pleasing to that loving father? On the contrary, he would have just cause for being greatly displeased at it. What is the matter with you, my son? He would say. Who has done anything against you? Have I given you cause for fear or anxiety? I am quite satisfied with you; I and all my friends rejoice at your return, and yet you look as sad and troubled as if you did not trust me. Have I deserved that from you? If I did not mean well towards you I should not have received you with such kindness. And you refuse to trust in me and to show me a cheerful countenance. There, timid, cowardly soul, you see how you act towards the good God when you doubt of your salvation on account of your past sins.

Ah, they say, must I not be sorry when I think of my past life and remember how often I have offended the good God by mortal sin? Peter wept during his whole life whenever he heard the cock crow, and was thus reminded of his denial of his divine master. Magdalene and other holy penitents used to shed tears constantly. And shall I, who have so often and so grievously sinned, be of good heart and joyful? Listen to me; it is one thing to repent of one's sins, to weep at the recollection of them, and another to be downhearted on account of past transgressions, to lose confidence in God, and to despair of salvation. Truly, you must be sorry, and may shed as many tears as you please when you think of your former sins, but your sorrow and contrition should be childlike, and not take away your inward confidence and repose of conscience; your sorrow should bring you a spiritual comfort and joy. For no one has more reason to rejoice than he who feels that he is heartily sorry for his sins, since that is a true sign that he is forgiven and is now a child of God. It is true that Peter, Magdalene

and many other saints wept constantly; but do you think that their tears were sad and melancholy, that they proceeded from fear and doubts regarding their salvation? Their tears were sweeter and more agreeable than all the laughter of the world. Amen.

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