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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 + + +  
VOL. 2 = The Penitent Christian  
Pentecost Sunday  
The Remembrance of the Presence of God, a Preservative against Sin

*“We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.” St. John 14:23.*

So much does God, who is all-sufficient to Himself, love a poor mortal who loves him, that, not satisfied with dwelling in heaven and earth, He wishes to dwell in that man personally with his whole divine essence. “If any man, love Me,” He says, “he will keep my word, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him,” that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost will take up their dwelling within him. Just souls, children of God, rejoice and exult, that this great honor is yours! Oh! be most careful never to lose by mortal sin the great Guest, your God, who dwells in and with you. And to avoid that misfortune, always remember

I. *That the best and surest means of avoiding all sin is the constant recollection of the presence of God; and therefore,*

II. *That he who wishes to be set from sin and to have his God dwelling in him, must always think to himself: God beholds me.*

I. When simple souls see a ropedancer performing his tricks, they sometimes come to the conclusion, that he does them by the aid of witchcraft or sorcery. For what wonderful things does not the ropedancer do on the slender rope suspended high in the air! He dances and leaps about with the weight of his whole body, bending backwards and forwards, as confidently as if he were on the ground. He makes somersaults in the air and alights on his feet; he hangs on the rope by an arm or a leg, and in a moment is on his feet again. Nay, sometimes he wheels a barrow over the rope, and rarely does he get a fall. “How is that possible?” says the simple peasant; you may say what you will, but that man has surely dealings with the devil. And yet the whole thing is natural enough. It only requires a certain bodily dexterity and agility, which can be acquired by practice. How does the ropedancer keep himself from falling? He has a long pole in his hands, with equal weights at either end, that help him to keep his balance. But that is not all; the chief thing consists in the man’s keeping his eyes fixed on a ring or globe, beside which there is a lighted candle. That is the point at which he must look constantly, in order not to lose his balance. During the performance, he never turns his eyes away from it, and even if he sways a little to one side, now and then, his gaze is still fixed on that central point. If he were to turn away from it, and begin to stare around him, neither his skill nor the balancing pole would be of the least assistance to him; he would certainly lose his balance, fall, and break his neck.

We may compare to a ropedancer each and every one who wishes to keep straight on the road to heaven. In this world, we are exposed to far more and far greater dangers than the ropedancer, and if we fall, it is not so

much the ruin of the mortal body as of the immortal soul. Wherever we go, we are walking in the midst of snares and traps set for our destruction at all times, and in all places. The prophet David says of the dangers and occasions of sin: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me" (Ps. 139:6). "The proud have hid a net for me: and they have stretched out cords for a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling block by the wayside" (ibid. 139:6). Oh, how deplorable is the fall of the just man! He seemed to have vaulted even to the heights of heaven. He shone in virtue and sanctity like the stars of the firmament, yet, in an unguarded moment, he fell headlong down from the mountaintops of righteousness into the depths of mortal sin! How shameful was the fall of David himself! Although he had ascended even to the heart of God; by one incautious glance he was turned from a just man into an adulterer and a murderer! How disgraceful the fall of Solomon, his son, the wisest man that ever lived! In spite of all his wisdom, he allowed himself to be ensnared by carnal love. He forgot his God, and bent the knee before dumb idols. How terrible the fall of Judas, the chosen apostle of Jesus Christ! Blinded by the love of money, he was changed from a saint into a despairing demon. With reason does St. Paul cry out to us all: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

What are we to do, what means must we make use of, to keep our balance and to avoid the danger of a fall? We must make use of a pole and of a light like the ropedancer, but our pole must be the fear of God, our light, the remembrance of the presence of God. "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance," as in that of a lighted candle, "and in thy name, they shall rejoice all the day" (Ps. 88:16, 17). "My eyes are ever towards the Lord," David says of himself before his fall, "for he shall pluck my feet out of the snare" (Ibid. 24:15), and will keep me from falling. His wise son gives us the same warning in the Book of Proverbs: "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart; in all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps: then shalt thou walk confidently in the way, and thy foot shall not stumble: for the Lord will be at thy side, and will keep thy foot, that thou be not taken" (Prov. 3:5, 6, 23, 26). Oh, if David and Solomon had acted according to their own beautiful advice, they would not have fallen so shamefully into sin!

Whence comes it that so many miserable falls occur in the world, and that sin, alas! is committed so frequently without scruple or shame, for some wretched thing, by people of all kinds, young and old, great and lowly, if not from the fact that they turn away their spiritual eyes from the grand central point, forgetting the great God, who is always present, and closely observing them? "God is not before his eyes" (Ibid. 9:5), that is, the eyes of the sinner. And what is the consequence? "His ways are filthy at all times." "His mouth is full of cursing," continues the Psalmist, "and of bitterness and of deceit" (Ibid. 7); his hands are full of injustice; his house is like a den of lions, in which he lies in wait for the innocent and poor, that he may oppress them, and all this, because "God is not before his eyes: For he hath said in his heart God hath forgotten, he hath turned away his face not to see the end."

So it is, nowadays, with each and every sinner. When people have made up their minds to commit sin, they try to blot out the thought of the all-seeing God, they are afraid of hearing anything which might make them uneasy, and disturb their wicked projects. They act, like the two elders who attacked the chaste Susanna with their impure proposal. "They perverted their own mind," says the Holy Scripture of them, "and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments" (Dan. 13:9). What wonder is it, then, that God should withdraw his fatherly hand from such men, allow them to run into danger, and to fall into many sins and be lost forever?

On the other hand, the Lord, according to his promises, cannot deprive of his help the man who with child-like confidence always keeps his eyes fixed on Him; nor can any one who has the least sense of decency left be so presumptuous and shameless as to dare to offend God at the very moment when he recollects his divine presence. Could a servant be so daring and insolent as to act the buffoon before the very face of his monarch, speak slightly of him, or draw his sword against him? Rebellious subjects may revolt against their lawful sovereign, and plot in secret against him, but where is the one who would dare penetrate into the royal chamber or cabinet, draw his sword, and assail his lawful king? Would not such a man be regarded as a madman? King Antigonus as he was once concealed in his tent, heard some of his ministers (who were standing before it), murmur against him whereupon he put his head outside the tent, and said to them: "Go a little further off, lest the king should hear you!" And the conspirators were as much shocked and frightened as if they had been smitten with a thunderbolt. In olden times a soldier once ventured to approach Marius, the celebrated general, with the intention of killing him; but no sooner had the general turned and looked at him, when he became

powerless, and unable to commit the intended murder. We read that Absalom, after having murdered his brother, was forbidden to appear in his father's presence; he "saw not the king's face" (2 Kings 14:24), which would doubtless have inspired him with fear and reverence. On returning to his father's house, the prodigal son wept bitterly, crying out: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," as it were, in thy very sight and hearing; "I am not worthy to be called thy son" (Ibid. 18:19).

II. Why have I spoken in such detail of these matters? That you may see all the clearer, the wickedness and presumption of the sinner who sins under the very eyes of his God. The man who witnesses my guilt is nothing to me; I have nothing to fear from him, except the pangs of shame, but to remember God's presence, and yet to sin, is nothing else than to mock God in thought and action, saying boldly to him: "See, my God, although I know that Thou art here, and seest me; although I know that this impure thought, this improper conversation, this shameful act, is very displeasing to Thee; although I am aware that Thou hast me completely in Thy power, and canst punish me as Thou pleasest, yet I will accomplish my wickedness under thy very eyes, and before thy face. Thou shalt be my witness and helper in my sin; what Thou hast promised or threatened is nothing to me; Thou mayest be angry or not, it makes no difference; I will gratify my passions and enjoy the pleasures Thou hast forbidden! "O what insolence, what presumption!

**We do not consent to sin until we have first shut the eyes of the mind to the thought of the presence of God; each sin we commit is a proof that we have not a lively faith that God sees us.** True, our conscience cries out: "God is looking at you!" but we close the ears of our mind, as it were, to its warning voice, when we wish to commit sin; we allow our thoughts to be distracted by things that flatter our sensuality, we drive God out of our hearts, and act like little children, who cover their eyes with their hands, and then think they are not seen. But, as the Apostle says: "Neither is there any creature invisible in his sight; but all things are naked and open to his eyes" (Heb. 4:13).

In vain did our forefather Adam, after his fall, try to hide from the sight of God. He did not hide from God, but hid God from himself. In vain did Cain, after the murder of his brother, try to escape the sight of the Lord; in vain did Jonas fly before his face: "The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most secret parts" (Ecclus. 23:27, 28). Woe to you, O sinner! who now deliberately shut God out of your thoughts, and do not wish to remember His presence. A time will come when you will wish to forget Him; but for all eternity you will have to think of Him to your intolerable torment and misery in hell! How so? Can it be that the thought of God, which is now so sweet and agreeable to his servants, will, hereafter, be a part of the punishment of his enemies? Certainly; if a lost soul could forget God, he would be free from the worst of his torments; but not for a single moment will he cease to remember in the liveliest manner and to acknowledge what he has lost in God. He will be always saying to himself: This God I could have possessed if I had wished, and had thought oftener of His presence during my life; but now I can have no part in Him forever. "The wicked shall see, and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away" (Ps. 111:10).

Ah, Christians, attend in time to these truths. Keep yourselves constantly in God's presence. Wherever you go, whatever you do, let this thought be before your minds: "God is looking at me; God is with me." He is here in this room, in the street, in the garden, in this company; everywhere I am surrounded by Him. "Whatever I do," says St. Augustine to Him: "Thou seest more clearly than I who do it; for all my actions are known to thee, who art present everywhere, as the perfect inspector of all thoughts, intentions, pleasures and actions." With these thoughts we must arm ourselves against all temptations, dangers, and occasions of sin; and, cry out to our temptors, as the chaste Susanna did, when she refused to commit sin under pressure of the elders' threats:

"It is better for me to fall into your hands without doing this thing, than to sin in the sight of the Lord" (Dan.13:22). The great God is looking at me, He is present here. Away, then, with this temptation, with this filthy passion! It is better for me to restrain it, and to forfeit all the delights of the world, than to sin in the sight of the Lord! Amen.

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