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What exchange shall a man give for his soul

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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

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

The Evil of Being too much Occupied

"And they began all at once to make excuse." St. Luke 14:18

The lives of many men resemble stagnant water, which, because it has no motion, generates nothing but worms and vermin. Such is the life of the idle man, who wastes his precious time in mere trifles, and is of no use to any one in the world, neither *to God*, *to his neighbor*, nor *to himself*. The lives of many others resemble a raging torrent that is always hurrying on its course without rest or repose; such are the lives of those who are involved in a multiplicity of labors, cares, and unceasing occupations, and whose efforts are directed solely to temporal things, with a view to gaining possession of perishable goods, or of increasing those they possess already, so that they have no time left during the day to think of working for the welfare of their souls. The parable of to-day's Gospel gives us an exact picture of this kind of people. The guests who were invited could not even spare time to come to the great feast. And why was that? "I have bought a farm," said one, "and I must needs go out and see it." Said the second: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them." The third said: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Thus, "they began all at once to make excuse," and not one of them tasted the supper to which they were all invited. Now, my dear brethren, although a life of that kind does not seem to lead to sin as much as an idle life, yet it is not a Christian life, and cannot lead to heaven.

A life that is too full of earthly cares and troubles is, in the site of God, an idle, useless, and therefore unchristian life.

I do not speak now of those occupations which are unlawful and contrary to the Christian law, but of temporal cares that are usual amongst men, and are not bad in themselves, nor are used for a bad purpose; of domestic employments that are lawful and even necessary for the support of one's family and to keep up one's position; of occupations such as are usual among servants in their daily work and attendance on their masters, among workmen in their workshops, among traders in their business, among lawyers and attorneys in the cases intrusted to them, among officials in their employments, among the higher authorities in their efforts for the common weal, in a word, among all men in what concerns their daily temporal occupations.

Now, when a man gives himself to such occupations so much that he has his hands and his thoughts full of them, so that he has no time to recollect himself during the day, and to do something for the service of God and the salvation of his soul, such a life is an idle, useless, and therefore unchristian life in the sight of God; not because the time is spent in doing nothing, but because too much is done, so that there is no leisure for the most important occupation of all, and that which ought to be done first.

The end for which alone we are created and placed in this world is to know God, to love him above all things with our whole heart, and thereby to work out our salvation. This is the chief business of all men, without exception, no matter what may be their age, state, or condition. Besides, you must all confess that the greater and more important a business is, the more time, diligence, care, labor, and attention it requires; the greater the good we hope to gain by success, the greater the loss and injury we have to dread if we fail. Further, you must also admit that a man, no matter what he may be, can have no greater or more important business in the world than the care of his soul and the service of God, for on that alone it depends whether he is to rejoice forever with his God in a place of endless delights, or to be tortured forever with the demons in an abyss of all imaginable torments. "For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul," after all his labor and trouble? "Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" (St. Matthew 16:26.)

And now I ask you, is it credible that those men who, as I have said, are too much given to worldly cares and occupations, and who spend day after day, and year after year, in them, can give the necessary care to the great and most important business of their souls? How is it possible for them to do so? If a man takes any business really to heart, he devotes his time and attention to it. If I want to work out something that is of great importance to me, I think and study about it for hours to see how I shall begin it; it is in my mind almost all day and night. Now, how much thought, consideration, care, labor, and diligence do men who are busied with worldly things give to the business of their souls during the day? They give the least possible time, nay, they can hardly spare a serious thought for it; nor can it well be otherwise, because our understanding is limited and cannot attend to two different things at the same time, so as to give each the proper share of attention.

When the Israelites were a source of great trouble to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and were asking leave, through Moses their prophet, to go into the wilderness to worship God, what did Pharaoh do to distract their minds from that thought? He told his officers to double the tasks of the Israelites, so that they should not have a moment's idleness: "Let them be oppressed with works," he said; "for they are idle, and therefore they cry, saying: 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Therefore, let them be oppressed with works, and let them fulfill them, that they may not regard lying words" (Exod. 5:8), that they may not have time to think of their God and of sacrificing to him. The infernal Pharaoh uses the same crafty plan to keep most men of the world away from the service of God and the care of their souls; he thinks: I will give them plenty of work.

Early in the morning, when they awake, I will fill their minds with all sorts of business and domestic cares, and so I will take away from God the best part of the day, which he especially wishes for. During the whole day they must remain busied in their shops or offices, so that they will have no time to think of God and of their immortal souls seriously and earnestly. Out of the twenty-four hours of the day these men can hardly find one in which to hear Mass; they have no time to collect their thoughts so as to make the good intention of offering up their work to God, and thereby increasing their merit; no time in the evening before going to rest to thank God, to examine their conscience and to purify it from sin by renewing their contrition; no time during the Sundays to hear a sermon; no time during the month to approach the Sacraments, to cleanse themselves from sin and to strengthen their souls with the Bread of life. In a word, their temporal cares and occupations are so numerous that they have hardly any time left to seek the kingdom of God. Find, if you can, the spirit of devotion amongst those Christians who are buried in worldly cares! Devotion, indeed, zeal and love for God! Where could you discover a trace of that in such people? Certainly not in their daily occupations, for they savor of the earth and of earthly things, and of course they can awaken only earthly love and desire. Even in the very devotions they now and then perform, there is no true piety. Such people, as far as devotion is concerned, are like to a sick man who is suffering from consumption, and who is almost wasted away, with pale countenance, deeply sunken eyes, prominent nose, hollow cheeks and short breath; the whole man is nothing but skin and bone, because the disease slowly dries up all the marrow and vigor of the body. In the same state is the soul of one whom too many worldly occupations deprive of all devotion and desire for heavenly things.

There is another great misfortune that the soul suffers by being too much taken up with earthly things. It can, as a general rule, have no peace or joy of heart, since it is continually disquieted and distracted from morning till night. It enjoys no peace in its understanding, which is filled with all sorts of thoughts and desires and wishes. No peace in its body, which has neither rest nor repose, and is continually fatigued in its search after riches. No peace in its conscience, which is stained with all kinds of faults and sins. So that poor slaves of this

kind have no peace with God nor themselves, and, generally speaking, not even with their fellow mortals, from whom they expect and fear many an annoyance and difficulty in their business.

Almighty God does not give his lights and graces at all times, nor in all places, but in certain circumstances, namely, when the soul is prepared and disposed to receive those graces. At least, it is certain that the good thoughts and inspirations suggested by the Holy Ghost, at a time when one is ill prepared for them, have not as much power and influence to move the human heart to good and to effect that good in it, as when the heart is willing and ready to receive them. The great light and grace which in such a wonderful manner were given to St. Ignatius, and changed him from a soldier of the world into a valiant champion of Jesus Christ, would not have been as efficacious if it had come to him when he was still an officer in the army and full of the distractions and disquiet of a military life. But afterwards, when he was lying wounded in bed away from all human conversation, and was engaged in reading the Lives of the Saints, that was the proper time in which his heart *was* really prepared to receive light and grace from God, and to follow the heavenly call in a most heroic manner. Now, tell me, what time or place for convenient entrance do the divine inspirations and graces find in the hearts of people who are too much occupied in the world? When they are asleep at night, wearied with their work? No, because their reason is then asleep, too. When they are hearing Mass on Sundays? No, for though their bodies are present in the church, their hearts are busied elsewhere with a thousand distracting cares. Perhaps during the day, in the midst of their schemes and plans and undertakings, grace may find its way to them. No, because they are not then engaged in heavenly things, and their hearts are not prepared or disposed to receive supernatural lights and graces. The only opportunity they might give to God to enlighten their hearts and bring them to a knowledge of themselves would be in the sermons on Sundays, but they seldom or never come to hear a sermon, because they have some business to attend to at the time. Another chance they might give to the Almighty to speak to them would be by frequent confession and Communion but they have no time for that; they very seldom approach the Sacraments during the year. And would to God that they received them even at Easter with the proper dispositions! But their manifold occupations take that time from them. They might read a spiritual book, or think of some of the truths of faith, of death, of the strict justice of God, of the joys of heaven, of the torments of hell, but they know nothing of those things; they have no time for them, and of course they seldom or never taste the inspirations and graces that God would give them to work out their salvation if they were prepared to receive them.

I admit that you must diligently perform the duties of your state of life, but you should remember that you must perform them with your hearts constantly raised to God. Is that the case with those who are buried in worldly business? You must know that the will and decree of the Almighty God bind no one to a duty, business, or occupation, that would leave no time for the divine service and for working out one's salvation, for all other cares and occupations, no, matter what they are, must be used solely as means to serve God, and to save one's soul. Everything that cannot be directed to this end is useless and worthless. "This, therefore, I say, brethren: the time is short," that we have to live on this earth. "It remaineth that they also who have wives, be as if they had none; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not" (I Cor. 7:29-31); that is to say, they who are engaged in worldly pursuits must keep their hearts as detached from them as if they did not care much about them, and reckoned the business of the soul as the only important one.

And what a folly it is to devote one's self to worldly things to such an extent as to lose eternal joys! To weary one's mind, to fatigue one's body, to live in constant turmoil, and to forget one's soul that must live forever! Unhappy martyrs of the world! you wear yourselves out, and spend your lives in working for the world, for something that you must soon leave behind, and you forget that on which everything depends, to work for the salvation of your soul! And for whose advantage do they thus toil and labor? For their children, their heirs and descendants; because they certainly do not require to work so hard and so excessively to support themselves. And what folly that is: to plague and wear one's self out for the good of others, and forget one's self meanwhile! What good will it be to you that others can live and enjoy themselves on what you earn by hard labor, if you yourself must go into the house of your eternity poor in merits, bare and naked of good works, and in extreme want? Alas, what a poor consolation it will be for you to remember on your deathbed that you have enriched others by your labor, but have nothing for yourself for all eternity! How will you appear before the judgment-seat of God, when he will demand a strict account of every moment of your life, and will ask you how, and in what you employed it? Will your children, your descendants, your heirs, whom you have enriched at the

expense of your soul, be then able to answer your Judge for you, to defend you, and to prove their gratitude for the wealth you left them by gaining heaven for you?

Alas, how you will then howl and weep, like the dying soldier-courtier, of whom we read that in his last moments he was visited by his sovereign, whom he had served for many years with great diligence and faithfulness. The king asked him if he could do nothing to comfort him, declaring himself willing to do all in his power. Ah, said the sick man, be so kind as to give me strength to live only a single hour without the intolerable pain that I now suffer; or if I must die, then see that I shall be able to enjoy happiness in the next life. I ask nothing more from you as a reward for having served you so long and so faithfully. My dear man, said the other, I cannot do that; it is not in my power. God alone can grant a request of that kind. Oh, woe to me, then, said the sick man; unhappy and foolish wretch that I am, I have lost all my labor and trouble for nothing! See, he said to those who were standing round, how uselessly I have squandered the precious time that God gave me to work out my salvation; how I have wasted it in the service of one who cannot free me for one hour from the pain I suffer, nor help me to escape the eternal torments that I have such good reason to fear in the next life. Oh, my dear people, learn wisdom from my folly; give the years of your lives to God, and to God alone, for he alone can free you from the pain and anguish of death; he alone has power to save you from eternal torments. Thus speaking, and full of repentance and sorrow, he breathed his last. Such, too, will one day be the case with all who, through excessive worldly cares, spend their lives for the advantage of others, and neglect their own souls. Amen.

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