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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 + + +

VOL. 2 = The Penitent Christian

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Danger of Deferring Repentance

*“There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance.” St. Luke 15:10.*

Last Sunday I showed the guilt and audacity of sinners who refuse to hear the calls of God, and defer their conversion. Now I ask: How is it with themselves? Do they despair of salvation? Have they given up all hopes of heaven? Put the question to them, and, doubtless, they will all answer: God forbid; we hope to save our souls, and to be happy in heaven. And on what do they ground their hopes? On repentance and the amendment of their lives? O sinners, if that be the case, then your hopes rest on the one sure foundation! Hear what He who seeks and receives sinners assures you of, and be consoled: “There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance!” Yes, they answer, it is on that assurance I depend. Come, then, at once! Do penance; amend your lives; run to your Shepherd, who is stretching out His arms to you! Certainly, they say; but not yet; later on. Oh! then I see that the foundation of your hopes is *future* penance? Let me tell you now, by way of paternal warning, that the procrastinating sinner’s hope of salvation is

1. *A false one; and*
2. *A treacherous and presumptuous one.*

I have still time enough; I am young and strong; I will repent by and by, confess my sins, and serve God faithfully. Such is the cry of most sinners. You hear it from blasphemers and slanderers; from the impure, the unjust, the vindictive; from drunkards, and from all who are not earnestly resolved to give up their accustomed vices. But I say to all of them: Now, repent now, do penance. Are you sure of a year, a month, a day, nay, even of an hour? The God of truth says to you and to me, “Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour” (St. Matthew 15:13). “Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come” (St. Luke 2:40). Whether you are old or young, weak or strong, sick or in good health, you know not whether you have a day or an hour of life still left.

The end of life should always be before the eyes of young and old; for our lives will not be demanded of us, as if they were an interest due at a fixed date. How then? Hear what St. Paul says: “Keep the good thing committed to thy trust” (2 Tim 1:14); be careful of the deposit that God has entrusted to your keeping. There is a great difference between a deposit, and interest that has to be paid. The interest is due at a certain time, before which it cannot be demanded; whereas a deposit has no fixed time, the lawful owner can claim it whenever he

pleases. This life is not an interest, but a deposit, so that there is not an hour in which one can be certain that it will not be demanded of him. The Lord of your life may this night give power to the demons to strangle you; or you may be suddenly struck dead this moment with a fit of apoplexy. If you were this evening to be pierced by a sword as you walk through the streets, or to be killed by a chance shot, you would only be the victim of an accident that has already caused the death of many who, like you, foolishly deferred repentance.

Do you not see, then, how false are your hopes of eternal happiness when you stake them upon an uncertain future, which is not yours, and which may never be yours? Suppose even that the indefinite future really arrives, how do you know that you will then be really converted and amend your life? You know what you have now determined to do; I now say to you, repent of and detest your sins, and quit them in future. No, you answer, not yet. And why not yet? Oh, it is too hard for me now; too difficult altogether to give up my love for that creature, to abstain from that pleasure, that bad habit. If it is too difficult now, what will it be afterwards, when you will have spent a long time in the indulgence of that foolish love, that sensual passion, that bad habit? Is it likely to be easier for you to abstain from it then, than now? If you will but use your common sense in the matter, you will see that your difficulty will increase with habit. A long sickness is troublesome to the physician; the physician cutteth off a short sickness. That is to say, a long-continued sickness wearies out the physician; while he has no trouble in curing a slight one. The disease that is inveterate has eaten into the marrow of the sick man's bones; it might have been cured if the remedy had been taken in time; but there is no chance now; it would take a miracle to save him.

Apply this to the maladies of the soul. A man commits a mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty, or by being careless in a dangerous occasion, or because he is overcome by some violent temptation; he commits it two or three times, and even oftener. Alas! He is already in a dangerous and fatal illness. But what does it take to cure him of it? A single converting thought prompted by his uneasy conscience. "My God!" he says to himself: "What have I done?" A single good inspiration from God or from his holy guardian angel, reminds him that he has lost heaven, and deserved hell. Or, perhaps, hearing a sermon, his conscience is touched; he begins to realize his wretched state. Any of these remedies may move him to earnest repentance and detestation of his sin, with a firm resolution never to commit it again; because his sin has not yet become inveterate, nor grown to a habit. But the habitual sinner, the unchaste man who has been for a long time wallowing in the filth of his unholy passions; the unjust man who has been steadily enriching himself by usurious and unlawful practices; the drunkard of long standing, accustomed to cursing and swearing; these and such as these, who have often confessed their sins, but not amended their lives, O, how troublesome and difficult they will find it to return to God by sincere repentance, to give up forever their sensual pleasures and accustomed vices, to begin to live chastely, justly, soberly, and holily. God may give them an inspiration, their good angel may speak to their hearts, all the preachers in the world may exhort them, but it is all to no purpose. Their sin is inveterate. The disease has long been eating into their vitals. Remedies are of no avail; and if God does not, so to speak, work a miracle in their behalf, there is no hope for them.

Has the world ever seen a more experienced physician of souls than our Lord Jesus Christ? How many great sinners followed Him, how many has He sought out Himself; and He cured them all. The first word of warning He spoke, cured James and John of their ambitious desire to have the first places in his kingdom. The first call He gave Matthew, then a public sinner, cured him of injustice so effectually, that he left all he had, and followed Christ. The incredulous Thomas was cured by the first touch. A single look was enough to make Peter weep bitterly for having denied his master; and the first ray of light that Magdalene received, cured her of the vice of impurity. Yet Judas died impenitent and despairing. Whence the difference? The former were prompt to accept and utilize the grace of repentance; Judas, on the contrary, had indulged his avaricious desires too long, and his disease had become inveterate. Long before he betrayed his Master into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver, he was, "a thief" (St. John 12:6), and therefore, he murmured at the waste of the precious ointment which Magdalene poured over our Lord's head and feet. And what excellent opportunities he had of correcting that vice?

II. Treacherous and presumptuous, indeed, O sinner, are those hopes of salvation that are built on an uncertain future! Your soul is now dangerously ill. I ask you, as our Lord asked the infirm man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (St. John 5:6). You have a salutary remedy at hand in the Sacrament of Penance, and you have been often exhorted to make use of it, but your answer has always been: No, I do not want that remedy yet; it is too

severe. There is still time enough. By-and-by, I will take the remedy, and be cured, But wait till that by-and-by comes, and you wilt find that it will then be too late; for it will be far more difficult for you to do penance then, than now. And even if, like Judas, you had then an inefficacious desire to do penance, the justice of God, wearied with waiting for you so long, will withhold from you the grace and the opportunity of repentance, of which you have made yourself unworthy. “Woe to them that are with child, and that give suck in those days,” says our Lord Jesus Christ (St. Matthew 24:19). Woe to those who are always full of inefficacious desires to do good works, and who never bring forth those desires into effect! Their good intentions will all come to naught at last. Job says of the habitual sinner: “His heart shall be as hard as a stone” (Job 41:15). He may in the end try to make his confession; but it will be a cold and dead confession, without true supernatural sorrow, without a firm resolution of amendment, and his heart will remain as hard as a stone that nothing can soften.

If a Hebrew was sold as a slave, he should have his liberty at the end of six years; but if he was contented with his position, and did not wish to be set at liberty, he had to remain a slave all his life. Who would be so foolish as to choose slavery in preference to freedom? Do you know, O sinner, who is guilty of that folly? *You* are, and so are all those who, being in the state of sin, could be converted to God by doing penance, and defer doing it. By mortal sin, you have sold yourself as a bond-slave to the devil. How long are you now bearing that galling yoke? The good God offers you to day, as He has often done before, the grace to free yourself from this slavery, and to regain the glorious freedom of his children. He says to you, in the words of St. Paul: “Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation!” Return to Me; do penance, and amend your life! But you go on refusing the proffered grace; you put off the Almighty to some future time, which will perhaps never come for you. You are satisfied with your slavery. You think and say, “I love my master;” I cannot give up that creature, and therefore, I do not desire freedom. Oh, woe to you! What will become of you? By divine permission, your master, the devil, will make you deaf to all good inspirations and exhortations. God will withdraw His special graces from you, so that you shall not be able to do penance; for repentance will then become so difficult for you, that, humanly speaking, it will be an impossibility for you to be sincerely converted to God. And, indeed, this is only a just punishment for abusing the patience of the Almighty. You do not wish to be free? He will say: Very well, then; remain in the slavery of the devil, and be his slave for all eternity!

I hear you say: This will not be my case. Many great sinners at all times have done just as I am doing, and they were sincerely converted at last, and gained eternal happiness. David was guilty of adultery and murder. He had the guilt of those sins on his soul for some years, before he thought of repentance, and he is now in heaven. Manasses was converted after having spent forty-five years in idolatry, sacrilege, murder, and tyranny. Magdalene was converted after having led, almost from her youth, a luxurious, scandalous, and sinful life, and became a saint. Matthew became an apostle after having been a usurer. Zacchaeus was received by our Lord, after having been a public and notorious sinner, guilty of many acts of injustice. There are countless examples of a similar kind. Why should I have less to hope than they had from the infinite mercy of God? At some future time, I intend to imitate them and to save my soul. Miserable hope! have you so soon forgotten what I have said to you? All the sinners you mention repented at once, as soon as they were enlightened by the grace of God, and had their eyes opened to their wickedness. They did not, like you, defer repentance to an indefinite period. Even supposing that some great sinners like yourself were truly converted, and saved their souls after having deferred penance, what assurance have you that the same thing will happen to you?

Again: for one habitual sinner who is converted and saves his soul, there are hundreds who never repent sincerely and who are lost forever. Having rejected the lights that were given them, and neglected to avail themselves of the opportunities of grace, by a just judgment of God, they are deprived in the end of those lights and opportunities. A certain usurer was often tortured by remorse of conscience on account of his wicked and un-Christian mode of life. He was repeatedly exhorted by others to give it up, but he used always to say, like you: “Certainly, I will give it up, and do penance, for I am not so foolish as to lose my soul for the sake of temporal things. I will amend, but not now. By-and-by, some other time, I shall have a better opportunity. There is no danger yet.” He fell sick; a zealous priest warned him of his state, and exhorted him to do penance and make restitution. Where was his “by-and-by” then? After remaining speechless for a long time, he at last cried out, in a loud voice: “O penance, where art thou? I cannot repent now, because, when I might have done so, I refused.” And having said these words, he breathed his last.

What do you think of this? May not the penance that you intend to do “by-and-by,” be frustrated in the same

manner? What will it then avail you to indulge a presumptuous hope built on such a treacherous foundation, in a matter that concerns your eternal bliss, or eternal misery? Say to yourself: "I am now in the state of sin, and if God were this moment to demand my life from me, I should certainly be lost forever. Now, in His goodness, He offers me His grace and invites me to do sincere penance, to amend my life, and to make sure of my eternal salvation, What may happen 'by-and-by' I know not, nor do I know whether there will be 'by-and-by' for me, or whether I shall then do penance, or not. I certainly do not wish to go to hell for all eternity. My great desire is to be happy with God in heaven. I must not, I cannot, and I will not wait any longer, but will at once make use of the means that Jesus Christ now offers me to regain entrance into the fold of His chosen sheep. "My sheep hear my voice," says the good Shepherd. But when do they hear it? At all times, as often as He calls? I hear Him crying out: "*Today*, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." *Today*, God is calling on me to be converted to Him and to abandon my wicked life. Therefore, this very day I will hearken to Him. I will repent of my sins, I will confess them candidly, and make a firm resolution never to commit them again. If you do this, you may have a sure and well-grounded hope that the Angels in heaven will rejoice over you, and that you shall hereafter rejoice with them for all eternity. Amen.

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