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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. 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## The False Hope of the Sinner Who Trusts in the Mercy of God

*“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” St. Luke 15:2.*

Sinners when exhorted to do penance generally say: God is merciful; his mercies are above all his works. Christ is the friend of sinners; he receives them, he eats with them, he rejoices with his Angels when a sinner is saved. What have we to fear? We trust in the mercy of God, and we shall be saved. Of such people the Holy Ghost says: “There are wicked men who are as secure as though they had the deeds of the just” (Eccles. 8:14). But to live in sin and trust for salvation to the goodness of God is not a firm hope, but rather a rash presumption; it is not a sign of election to heaven, but rather of eternal reprobation, as I shall now prove, to inspire the wicked with a salutary fear that they may amend in time, if they wish to have the consolation of a firm hope of salvation.

*I. The presumption of sinners in hoping for heaven because God is merciful is a sure sign of eternal reprobation, because it is a most outrageous act of contempt towards God.*

*II. This presumptuous hope is a sure sign of reprobation, because God is, as it were, forced to damn those who act thus presumptuously.*

I. Suppose you have an enemy who has grievously offended you, and on whom you would like to be revenged if you had the chance; but he is too strong for you. See, there he goes across the market-place; run after him at once, fall upon him, and let him feel the effects of your anger! No, no, you say, I must not think of that. Why? Because he is much stronger than I; he is not likely to let me off easily; I know him well, and am sure that if it came to blows I should be the worst off. In that case you act prudently to let him alone. But have you no hesitation in attacking and offending your God, who has never done anything to injure you, but has always been your benefactor? Why is that? Is he perhaps weaker than you, so that you can rely on your strength in provoking him? Can you go anywhere to escape him, so that you may take refuge in flight? Can he not hurl you into hell amongst the devils, in the very place, at the very moment in which you insult him? If you knew that such would be the consequence of the first sin you commit, would you commit it? No, you say, I would not be so foolish, no matter how strong my inclination, how violent my passion. And what makes you now so daring that you do not fear to heap sin on sin? Is it not because you believe, hope and trust that God will not

punish you, that he will not send you to hell, but will forgive you your sins as he has already done for so many? You are like the wicked man of whom St. Augustine speaks: "Behold," you say, "I did it yesterday, and God spared me; I do it to-day, and God spares me; I shall do it to-morrow because God spares." But what sort of a foundation is that for you to build your belief, hope on, that he will spare you in the future? Because, you answer in thought, God is a good, patient, merciful Father, who is easily appeased and easily persuaded to admit the sinner to his friendship; and I hope that he will not abandon me in future, because his mercy is infinitely greater than all the sins of the world are grievous. Therefore you sin because God is good and merciful? Therefore, because God is good you are bad.

Truly, to sin because we know that God is good and merciful, and that he will act kindly towards us, is an insult to God, a malice than which none greater can be found among men or demons. If a man sins sometimes through weakness or surprise, or through being in the occasion of sin or through violence of passion that he cannot resist without the utmost difficulty, and fears and trembles in his uneasy conscience the moment the sin is committed, he has, indeed, done wrong, but he seems to be in some degree to be borne with, because he has given signs of an honorable disposition; he knows that he has offended God, and that knowledge fills him with fear and terror. If a man sins through despair of the mercy of God, like Cain and Judas, and says to himself: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon" (Gen. 4:13), that is indeed one of the most grievous sins, and yet it is not so bad and terrible as presumption. Why? Because the despairing man has still some respect and awe for the infinite holiness and strict justice of God; and he acknowledges his own wickedness, which he imagines to be so great that he cannot be pardoned. The devils in hell and all the reprobate curse and blaspheme God, a terrible sin! Yet I can easily understand it. Why? Because they experience nothing from God but the rigors of his justice; they have nothing to expect from him for all eternity but to feel the weight of his chastising hand; they have no share in the goodness and mercy of God, and no hope of any alleviation of their torments. But you, presumptuous man, do what no other sinner in the world, what none of the reprobate in hell, and not even the devils do: you sin and insult God precisely because he is so good to you; precisely because you console yourself with the hope of his mercy, and because you flatter yourself that you will be happy with him for all eternity.

Now, if you have any common sense left, you can see for yourself whether your manner of acting towards God, whether the presumption with which you treat him is likely to move him to show you his mercy and to give you at the hour of death a special, extraordinary grace that he is bound to give to no one, and thus to place you among the small number of the elect, and to make you eternally happy. How could you expect such a favor? If you have offended the justice of God, you have still a refuge left in his mercy; but if you attack that and insult it, where will you fly for help? Wicked as you are, I believe that God would rather give you the grace to prophesy future events, to heal all sorts of diseases, and to raise the dead; for even Judas worked miracles, and was damned at last in spite of them. But the grace of perseverance, of a happy death, of eternal salvation is not for the sinner who presumptuously trusts in the mercy of God in the midst of his wickedness; to expect it under such circumstances would be to expect that God will not punish our sins, and that, too, on the day on which he will let sinners feel the weight of his indignation and strict justice. Ah, be not too sure; do not sin because God is good!

II. God will, as it were, be forced to condemn the presumptuous sinner. Why? His honor requires it. If a man of respectability is insulted and ill-treated without cause, if he is of a meek and gentle disposition he will say nothing about the offence for the first or second time, although he may be able to defend himself. But if he sees that his meekness and patience only encourage the other to insult him more boldly, then he says to himself: I cannot stand that; I must show him that I can take my own part; that I am not a child, or a fool, whom any one can vex as he pleases, and from whom one has nothing to fear. Otherwise people will look on me as an idiot whom they can treat as they wish. And what else have the vindictive on their lips and in their hearts but their honor? They try to excuse the sins they commit by saying: My honor was concerned in the matter. What do we take our God to be? What sort of an opinion have we of his patience and mercy? Have we to do with a dumb, senseless image? With a wooden Jupiter, who holds a wooden thunder-bolt in his hand; whom one can treat as he pleases without having anything to fear? "Be not deceived," says St. Paul; "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7).

And what would become of the public honor and glory of God in the world, if moved by that hope he granted the grace of a happy death to many of those presumptuous sinners, who would take any trouble to win heaven if one might live as he pleased, and if, generally speaking, nothing was required for salvation but a firm confidence in the goodness of God. What a vicious life the wicked would then lead! What scorn and ridicule infidels would heap on God! What scandal would be given to the innocent! What cause for murmurs and complaints to pious Christians when they see heaven cast before swine and dogs, that is, offered gratuitously to presumptuous sinners, while they themselves have to work so hard for it, and even in the midst of their holy endeavors are in constant fear and anguish of losing it, and have to say with Job: "I feared all my works, knowing that thou didst not spare the offender" (Job 9:28); and meanwhile the others indulge their passions freely and without anxiety, and yet have a sure hope of gaining heaven?

Finally, if God were to leave his honor out of the question, he would still be bound to respect his fidelity, and his own pledged word would compel him to take vengeance on such sinners, and to make them feel the effects of his justice. But, you say, has not God promised his help, his special assistance in the hour of death, and the eternal joys of heaven to those who put their trust in him? Yes; but to whom who thus hope has he made that promise, and in what manner should they hope? To those who, with childlike confidence, abandon themselves to him with a hope well grounded on their own co-operation. "His mercy is from generation unto generation," such are the joyful words of the Mother of God, "to them that fear him" (St. Luke 1:50); not to them that despise him. But where is it written that God has promised to protect, presumption?

"Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?" But if you pervert into an occasion of sin that which should serve for your amendment, then you must know that with your impenitent heart you heap up for yourself treasures of anger and wrath against the day of wrath, that is, against the day of your death. This heaping and treasuring up takes place when man, trusting to the mercy of God, heaps up a multitude of sins. "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day; for his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee" (Ecclus. 8,9). "I called, and you refused;" I have had patience for a long time; I offered you my mercy in time, but you would not accept it; "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock" (Prov. 1:24, 26). "You shall seek me, and shall not find me" (St. John 7:34), but shall die in your sins.

You who serve the Lord, who feel yourselves encouraged to constancy and fervor in the divine service, to a greater love of God by the meditation of the goodness and mercy of God, to you I say, with David: "Serve ye the Lord with gladness" (Ps. 99:2). "Delight in the Lord, and he will give you the requests of your heart. Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in him, and he will do it" (Ps. 26:4, 5). And you, too, oh, sinners! although you may have committed a million sins, if the contemplation of God's mercy brings you to sorrow or repentance, and to a true amendment of life, then do not despair; return humbly to the right way; keep on saying: God is good; God is infinitely merciful, and therefore I am sorry from my heart that I have offended such a good God; and therefore I now make the firm resolution never again willfully to offend such a loving Father. Trust in the Lord; the sins you have committed, and now repent of, will never equal the greatness and the multitude of his mercies.

But you, on the other hand, presumptuous Christians, to whom the consideration of the divine mercy is only a spur to a wicked or tepid or more slothful life, an occasion of persisting in the state of sin, and deferring repentance from day to day, meanwhile adding to the catalogue of your crimes, you, I say, turn your thoughts in time to the other side, and consider the strict justice of God, which will not allow itself to be played with. Think: it is God who will render to every one according to his works; who keeps in his anger till the day of wrath, when he will say to most men: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire;" therefore, return to the merciful God!

And all of you, whoever you may be, that you may not err by excess or defect, select the golden mean; hope and fear at the same time; fear sin; hope in the goodness of God. The fear of God's justice should make you careful to avoid the occasions of sin, lest you should fall; the hope in God's mercy should give you courage and comfort, that you may rise again immediately if you are so unfortunate as to fall. Amen.

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