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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 + + +

Short Sermons for all the Sundays of the Year

BY: Father Francis Hunolt

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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Folly of the Proud

“We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.” St. Luke 5:5.

No wonder that the fishermen brought their nets and boats to land in sheer vexation. Why should they give themselves further trouble? They had labored all the night and had taken nothing. They were tired of this useless toil. How many there are nowadays who also labor in vain! The world is often compared to a great sea, in which worldlings toil day and night to secure a large fish; some fish for honors, praise, reputation, and authority amongst men; others for wealth and temporal goods; others for sinful and impure pleasures. After having toiled and troubled for many years, they must at last cry out, like the Apostles: “We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.” Nothing is more capable of inducing a reasonable man to withdraw his heart and his desires from the vanity of the world, in order to fix them on God and heavenly things, than due knowledge and consideration of this truth. I will speak today on the folly of the proud.

You may be great before men, you may also be great before God; yet you act foolishly if you are great in your own eyes and have a high opinion of yourself.

I. That which makes one great before men consists mostly in the gifts and goods of nature which one has, such as a good understanding, prudence, knowledge, learning, skill, bravery, and the beauty and perfection of the body; or it may consist also in external advantages, such as riches, honors, dignities, nobility of birth, renown, praise, the love and good wishes of the people, etc. These and similar things appear great and noble in the eyes of the world, which generally judges by mere outward appearances. Such gifts and goods are to be valued in themselves only in so far as they help us to our last end, that is, to serve God and save our souls. On the other hand, that which makes one great before God is the possession of supernatural goods and the gifts of grace, especially sanctifying grace and the friendship of God, the Christian virtues, diligence in the practice of good works, the beauty of the soul and holiness of life. A poor beggar who possesses these things, although the world looks on him as an outcast, is worth far more, in the sight of God and His Saints, than princes, kings, or emperors who are deficient in them.

It is impossible for a man to be great before God once he commences to be great in his own opinion. He cannot be holy unless he is little in his own eyes and humble of heart. No matter what virtues a man has, no matter what good works he performs, they are worth nothing unless they be supported by humility. No matter

how prudent, wise, and clever he may be, he acts in thought and imagination like a fool. Why so? He who has nothing of his own, and who knows that at any moment that which is entrusted to him, but does not belong to him, may be demanded from him by the rightful owner, acts foolishly if he thinks himself great and gives way to pride. All of us are poor, and we need not go beyond ourselves to find reasons for being humble, and having a low opinion of ourselves; for, if we consider what we have from nature, we are nothing; it is from nothing the Creator has drawn us; a hundred years ago all here present were nothing; can anything be viler or more worthless than nothing? Dust and ashes and corruption are the first materials of our being, so that each one of us can truly say, with holy job: "I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; to worms: My mother and my sister" (Job 17:14).

Therefore, lest we should forget the vileness of our origin, and think ourselves greater than we are, the Catholic Church, in the beginning of Lent, when the ashes are sprinkled on our foreheads, reminds us of the words of God: "Remember, man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3:19). If you are tempted to self-complacency or pride, remember your origin, whence you are, and what you have of yourself, and the temptation will soon vanish: Consider, oh, man, whence thou comest, and blush.

Let us consider, too, what we are in ourselves, with regard to the state of grace, and we shall find that we are not even good; for we are born slaves of the devil; we are conceived in sin, born in sin, and sin is the only inheritance we bring into this world. Could there be a greater misery or misfortune than ours? Oh; how humble this thought compels us to be! I am a sinner; I am an object of the hatred and anger of God; I am a child of damnation, and therefore worthy to be looked down upon and despised by all creatures.

2. But if we have something more than nothingness; and something better than sin, if we are in the state of grace, and are friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, if we possess, besides, a goodly share of natural gifts and temporal blessings, where do they come from, to whom do they all belong? Are they not pure gifts of God, who has given them to us gratuitously? What am I saying? Given them to us? We have only the keys of them, that we may look after them; at any moment, how and when it pleases him, God can take them from us.

With regard to natural gifts and goods, who can doubt that the same is to be said of them, unless he who doubts the truth of the Word of God? "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; He humbleth and He exalteth; He raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dung-hill" (I Kings 2:7, 8). Even the goods we have gained, as we think, by our own labor and trouble, do not belong to us, but are the free gifts of God's goodness.

With regard to supernatural goods, St. Paul says that we are incapable of doing the least good of ourselves, but we cannot even say a single good word without the help and influence of the Holy Ghost: "No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. 12:3). Nor is this enough; we cannot even wish to do anything good of ourselves, as the same Apostle writes to the Philippians: "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will" (Philipp. 11:13). And, what makes our incapacity still more evident, it is not in our power to form a good thought without the help of God. "Not that we are sufficient to think of anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). So that everything natural and supernatural that we have in body or soul belongs to God alone.

3. Have we, then, any reason to be proud and haughty? To look upon ourselves as greater and better than others? To have a vain complacency in ourselves? To give way to self-conceit and despise others who have received less from God? Oh, that would indeed be folly and madness on our part! "Why dost thou glory?" as St. Paul says; poor worm of the earth, why dost thou give way to self-conceit? How long wilt thou plume thyself on thy possessions? "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory?" (I Cor. 4:7). Foolish man, show me something that is thine; thou canst not point to anything worth a straw; thou hast but the nothingness out of which God has drawn thee, and, still worse, sin, which thou hast brought with thee into the world. Why dost thou glory? What cause hast thou to be proud? Are you rich? Have you a large estate, much money and property? Can you lead a comfortable life? Does the world look upon you as happy? Still, "why dost thou glory?" Do you think a great deal of yourself? If so, are you better and greater, on that account, than others who are not so rich as you? Why should you be? Where did you get your wealth from? To whom does it really belong? Is it not simply lent to you by the Almighty God? How, then, can you

boast of it? Suppose, in order to make the matter clearer by a simile, that one is so reduced in circumstances by misfortune that he has to be supported by alms privately given, but that, by the help of those alms, he can keep up appearances, and dress in a manner becoming his state. Ordinary people, who know nothing of his poverty, are as respectful to him as if he were still rich. Who is that man? they ask; to judge by his dress and appearance, he must be a man of position. If he were to hear what they say of him, what would he think? Would he give way to pride and vanity? Oh, if he did that, he would be a most intolerable fool! God help me, he would rather think, with shame in his heart and tears in his eyes; I am a rich man, when I am living on alms given me for God's sake! What would I do without my benefactor? If he dies, what will become of me? I should have to beg, in spite of my grand clothes, or else starve with hunger. No; all the honor and respect shown such a man only serve to shame and humble him. Oh, man, no matter how rich you are, have you not the same cause for humility? Where do your riches come from? Are they not an alms given you by God, who, in His mercy, and according, to His wise decrees, sends them to you, as it were, privately? Whenever He wishes He can take them from you and reduce you to beggary. Why, then, do you glory and exalt yourself above others?

Are you quick of understanding, so that you can learn several arts and sciences with little trouble? Men admire and praise you on that account; but are you, therefore, any greater or better than others? To whom do your talents belong? Are they not an alms that God has given you gratuitously? Why, then, do you give way to proud thoughts? Suppose that I am wandering about on a dark night in a forest; I have lost my way and know not where to go. Suddenly, to my great delight, I see a man with a lantern a few yards off; he takes pity on me and guides my steps to the nearest village; with the help of his lantern I can see as well as if it were day. On the following morning other travelers arrive, who complain of having been compelled to remain in the forest all night, because it was so dark that they could not find their way. Oh, you stupid people, I say to them, how did that happen? It makes no matter to me whether it is dark or light, I can find my way in either case. What a clever man you must be, they think. What would you think of such conduct on my part? Would it not be a foolish thing to boast in that way, and to seek the praise of others? Ah, I must think to myself, if that good man had not had the kindness to accompany me with his lantern, I, too, should have had to spend the night in the forest. In the same way, he who is gifted with more intelligence than others must say to himself, with deep humility: If the Lord did not go before me with that light, "which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (John 1:9), I should be as stupid and dull as the most uncultivated of men. The talent that God has given me He can take away from me, so that the praise and honor I receive do not belong to me. Not to me, oh, Lord, not to me, but to Thee and to Thy name be honor!

You are prosperous in all your affairs; whatever you begin, you are enabled to finish; whatever you undertake, you are sure of carrying out successfully; you perform all your duties in a praiseworthy manner; but what if you do? Is that a reason why you should have a great opinion of yourself, or give way to self-complacency? Are you on that account greater or better than others, who do not always succeed, and who are not able to do what you can? It would be foolish for you to think that. For, why is it that you can do more than others? Is it not because God has given you a greater alms than He has given them? God is the skilful: Master, who knows how to make use of his creatures as instruments for different purposes; He it is who can of the stones raise up children to Abraham, He can use each creature for any purpose He pleases; so that He could give a fly the power of building up heaven and earth. Now, if this Almighty God has chosen you, instead of others, to perform great exploits, or to exercise great skill in any art, that is not to your credit, but rather to that of the skilful Master who knows how to make use of you so well. If, instead of using you, He had preferred a most ignorant person, the latter would have been just as successful as you are now; so that, as far as you are concerned, you are not a bit better than he is. Why are you, then, so foolish as to have a high opinion of yourself?

Are you of commanding stature or beautiful person, so that you attract the eyes and hearts of all? Do you, therefore, spend half the day before the looking glass, admiring your beauty? Do you trick yourself out as beautifully as possible, and then show yourself off before the public, so as to court admiration? What a senseless vanity is yours, if so! It is just as if one picture wished to extol itself above another, because it is finished in clearer colors, although both depend on the will of the painter, who has only to give one touch with

his brush in order to change the likeness of a beautiful angel into that of a horrible demon. Or, to use a comparison more to the point, it is as if a chimney, blackened with smoke, were to boast of its appearance because in the wintertime it is covered with snow.

How long will the snow last? The first shower of rain, or a good fire kindled on the hearth underneath, will put an end to it at once, and the chimney will be as black and ugly as it was before. Vain worldling, why are you proud of your beauty? What else is it but a color that the Great Artist has given to your body? Can He not at once destroy it, if He wishes? A festering sore, a cancer, a fever, is quite enough to put an end to it. Wait a few years: old age will bring its wrinkles, or else the soul, in its flight from, the body, will leave it to worms and rottenness.

Think of the couch which awaits you after death, and there will soon be an end of your pride: "Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering."

Finally, and speaking of those goods which alone are worthy of praise, are you great in the sight of the Lord God, are you pious, holy, zealous in his service? Do you know of no sins to trouble your conscience? If so, I congratulate you, for you are far better off than all those who are in the state of sin. But certainly you have least cause of all to be proud, and far the greatest cause to be humble and lowly in the grace and favor of God. For where do your piety and holiness come from? Is it from yourself? Certainly your co-operation has been required, but your holiness first came from the special grace and assistance of God. If He abandoned you to your own weakness for a moment what would become of you? A child may laugh and enjoy itself as long as its mother leads or carries it about; but it cannot be proud on that account, because if the mother leaves it alone for a moment it falls down at once. You can rejoice and be glad in the Lord because you have a good conscience, and you can thank Him for the special graces He has given you; but to have a great opinion of yourself, and imagine that you are greater and better than others, would be folly indeed.

You see, then, that no man, no matter how great he is before the world, or even in the sight of God, if he considers well his circumstances, can have the least cause for self-glorification; but rather every cause to be humble, lowly, and meek before God and men. You see how true are the words: "For if any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." In a word, he who thinks much of himself, and desires the esteem of others, is not a wise man, but a fool. We must never look down upon, much less despise or treat contemptuously any one, even the meanest beggar, or the greatest sinner; for he has just as much and just as little of his own as we have. Finally, in all the contradictions we meet with, whether they come from God in the shape of crosses and trials, or from men who insult and injure us, or put us to shame and humiliation, we must always be satisfied in all humility, and think: I am nothing of myself; I deserve nothing good, so that no injury is done me, if I do not get the praise, reputation, or pleasure I desire. I came into the world a sinner, deserving of hell; it is quite right, then, for me to suffer the punishment of sin; I have no reason to complain if anything is done to cause me pain, for I deserve hell and all its torments.

Ah, Christians, if we only thought of this always! Oh, humility, would that thou wert as common amongst us as the reasons we have for being humble are numerous! What a change there would be in us! Amen.

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