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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
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Truth of the Catholic Religion

“From henceforth thou shalt catch men.” St. Luke 5:10

The bark of Peter is a figure and symbol of the Catholic Church, in which Peter, as chief steward of Jesus Christ, and his successors, the Popes of Rome, were to have the chief authority. The miraculous draught in which Peter, having launched his nets at the order of Christ, caught a countless multitude of fish at one haul, is a symbol of the preaching of the Gospel, by which Peter and the other Apostles, sent for the purpose by Christ, spread the Christian religion throughout the world, caught a countless multitude of people of every nation and brought them into the true Church. A circumstance which merits our greatest admiration, for it is one which, in itself alone, if we had no other proofs, would show the infallible truth of the Christian religion, and would convince any one that this religion can come only from God; it is a matter which is in itself sufficient to convince and to confound all Un-believers, who either do not believe in the Church, or who have separated from her, or who live as if they really had no faith at all. Since there are, alas! many of the latter class even amongst Catholics, in our days, I shall now try to develop these ideas a little more fully.

Since the Catholic Church is founded on Peter, and established and spread by Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles, in such a way that nothing can overcome her, she must necessarily be founded by God, and be true.

St. Augustine says the Christian religion was begun and spread throughout the world by Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles, with real miracles, or without miracles. If miracles helped to found the Church, then God must of necessity be their author, for he alone is the Almighty God who has nature in his power, who can set bounds to her and perform real miracles; consequently this religion cannot be false, for God cannot approve of and confirm falsehood by miracles wrought either by himself or by others; otherwise he would not be an all-true and perfect God, but one who could and would deceive and betray. Did the Apostles work no miracles in founding the Church? Then that is the greatest miracle of all; for who could imagine that such a work could be accomplished by such men, in such a manner, and with such effect, with such fortunate, permanent and complete success, if a higher, supernatural and heavenly strength had not helped in the work?

I. First: what sort of a work was it that was about to be commenced? A religion and faith had to be founded and introduced over the whole world into all kingdoms and countries, according to the command of our Lord to his disciples: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations” (St. Matthew 28:19); “preach the Gospel to every creature” (St. Mark 16:20). Not a single nation was to be excluded. “Teach all nations,” an entirely new

religion, of which the world had hitherto known nothing. A religion which brooks no rival, and which alone is necessary to salvation: "He who shall not believe, shall be condemned." A religion whose mysteries are completely opposed to all other religions then known in the world; and to introduce those mysteries it was necessary to overthrow so much idolatry, so many forms of belief, nay, even Judaism itself, to confound all worldly wisdom and convict it of ignorance, error, and falsehood, to confront all human power and the rage and anger of kings and emperors, and to conquer all by the force of truth, and to root out the old, inveterate manners and customs of all peoples and nations, which they had inherited from their forefathers, and to cause them to be abandoned at once and forever. And yet, that had to happen amongst all the peoples of the world, who had to be completely changed and converted as far as their ideas and morals were concerned. And it all really happened. Just as in the beginning, a single word of God created the world. "He spoke, and it was done." When the world knew nothing of the Christian faith, that faith was announced: "He ordered it to be announced, and it was received."

A faith which appears to go against all reason and which seemed utterly unintelligible to the worldly wise of the time; a faith which teaches, for instance, that there is one God and that in him there are three distinct Persons. How can that be? who can believe it? If there is only one God, how can there be three to constitute him? If there are three distinct persons, how can there be only one God? A faith which believes in one who is God and man at the same time, so that it can be said with truth, God is man and man is God; a man is Almighty, Eternal, Immortal; God is born in time, he grew up and died as a man; who can understand that? God is immortal; how, then, can he be a man who died? That man is subject to weakness, change, and the miseries of this life; how can he be God, who is unchangeable, impassible, all-perfect, and happy? Yet people, even the most learned and the wisest, were to be convinced of this seemingly contradictory truth, and to such an extent as to be ready to give up all they possessed, even their life's blood, for the sake of it.

A faith which appeared opposed, not only to reason, but even to honor, which was branded with a mark of infamy, inasmuch as its author (as was also necessary to be believed) was publicly seized by the authorities, tried in various tribunals, condemned as a malefactor and crucified. What a stumbling-block for the Gentiles! What an opportunity, and an apparently justifiable reason were thus offered for saying (as was really often said) that Christianity was the religion of the wicked and a cesspool of vice, since its teacher and author suffered the shameful death of a thief or murderer! Yet the world has believed. That a crowd of people should have run after Christ when he changed water into wine, or multiplied the loaves, or healed the sick, the dumb, and the blind, or raised the dead, there was nothing in that to do violence to sound reason; but that so many people should follow Christ after his shameful death on the cross, that is what the human mind cannot grasp.

If, at least, this religion had prepared something agreeable and pleasing, something to appeal to human sensuality and to natural desires; or if God had created for the purpose a new race of people, free from all bad inclinations, then this wonderful work might have been explained, and would have ceased to be so wonderful; just as it is not a matter for great astonishment that before Christ heathenism, and after his time Mahomedanism, gained such influence in Asia and Africa, or that, in later times, Luther, Calvin and other heresiarchs had so many followers in Germany, England, France and other places; there is nothing, I say, wonderful in this; the wonder is, rather, that all the kingdoms of the world did not follow suit. But the real Christian religion, which had to be introduced in those days, was a law severe and strict and opposed to all sensuality; it inculcated the necessity of temperance, fasting, self-denial, and mortification; it called upon men to say: "Blessed are the poor" (St. Matthew 5) It proclaimed, "Blessed are they who suffer persecution." It said, "Blessed are they who mourn." What sort of a law is that which says to the proud that they must be humble and become like little children; to the avaricious, that they must detach their hearts from earthly goods, and look upon riches as dust? What sort of a law is it that tells the sensual man to mortify his flesh with its desires, to take up his cross daily and follow Christ; that commands a vindictive, injured, and angry man to pardon his enemy and love him, to do good to those who hate him, to pray for those who persecute him. For my part, it seems that this work presents an insuperable difficulty, nay, even an impossibility to be accomplished; or, if a religion that apparently opposes all natural reason, honor, and inclination, finds credence amongst men, then a supernatural Being must have spread it, for such a result could never have been brought about unless by the strong arm of the Almighty God.

Imagine that you are back again in the old heathen times; that you have before you a Plato, who was then a miracle of wisdom, or a Socrates, who was then called the master and teacher of moral virtues. But if one of those dead came to life again, without knowing of what has happened in the world since his time, and if you were to show him how that work prospered, with all the circumstances before described, how this religion is spread over the whole world, how there is at the present moment no single form of belief that is so general and respected as this; how it is received by great and small, without distinction; by the experienced and the inexperienced, by emperors and peasants, by savages and statesmen; could he ever imagine that to be the case if he did not see it with his own eyes? Would he not be astonished at such a work?

Are they gods, he would say, or men, who have done this? They were men, you would answer; their chief was called Peter; the others were named Paul, Andrew, John, twelve in all. What! twelve men to renew the whole earth? What could twelve men do in a single kingdom; in one country, nay, even in a single town? How could they, then, suffice for all the peoples and nations of the earth? Nevertheless, they were twelve in number who undertook this work; they separated from each other; one went here, another there; they went north, south, east, and west, from one kingdom to another, from one town to another; they presented themselves almost alone before the people, and preached their doctrine to them: "But they went forth and preached everywhere."

But, at least, they must have been twelve powerful kings, he would say, who could frighten people with their glory and power, or bribe them with their money and riches, or compel them by force of arms, or enchant them by their wonderful wisdom and oratory. Twelve mighty kings, indeed! They were twelve poor men, mostly fishermen, who owned not a finger's breadth of land; who traveled about barefoot, without scrip or staff, as their Master told them (St. Luke 10); who carried all their property on their persons, suffered from hunger many times, lived constantly on alms, and left poverty behind them as their only legacy; whom could they have bribed? Their learning and knowledge, as far as worldly matters were concerned, consisted in knowing how to make nets and to catch fish; they had learned nothing else. From this you may see that they could have had very little authority, either from their own persons or from their lowly descent, or from the person of their Master; for he who sent them forth was looked upon as a malefactor by the world, and was therefore put to death.

Peter, indeed, once had a sword, but he, and all the others as well, were forbidden by their Master to make use of it. On the contrary, wherever they came they found everything against them; as their Master told them, they went like sheep among ravening wolves; they were banished from one town to another and driven away; they were dragged before the tribunals, imprisoned, and scourged publicly; he who could deliver them up, living or dead, thought he was doing a service to God. And are these the people who accomplished such a work in such a manner? Yes, these poor, ignorant, lowly, and weak fishermen have accomplished that work; they have made kings and judges tremble; they have brought the world over to their conviction and faith.

One question more, says the worldly-wise philosopher: where did they first begin to preach their doctrine? They must have been simple, stupid people who first believed in them. And you will answer, they began in Jerusalem itself, in the very city where Christ, their Master, was crucified, where his name was still in odium in that city, in which a number of people, from all nations under the sun, were at the time assembled. I imagine that I see these twelve poor men rushing out into the streets on Pentecost day, from the room in which they had hidden themselves through fear. Where are you going to? I ask them; and they answer: We are going to announce to all the people that he whom they crucified is their God; that they must adore him, submit to his law, be baptized and give up their ancient faith as well. But, my good people, what idea possesses you? You will have the same reward that your Master received on the cross. And yet, a little while after, hardly has Peter opened his mouth, when I see with astonishment the people throw themselves in crowds at his feet, weeping and doing penance, and that three thousand of them are baptized on that very day. After that I see the Apostles going to the greatest city of the world. Peter, I ask, where are you going? I am going to Rome to the Capitol, to the governors and rulers of the world, to the courts of kings and emperors. And what will you do there? I will tell them that they must pull down their false gods; that their religion is a false, devilish, and impious superstition, and that they shall adore the crucified Jesus as the true God. And Paul, where are you going? To the Senate-house at Athens, to the schools of the worldly-wise, to preach the same doctrine. But what a fruitless undertaking that will be! And yet, I learn that their words have produced fruit; a few years later I see the cross glitter on the crowns of emperors and kings, the idols trampled under foot by the common people, the city of Rome, formerly the centre of all kinds of idolatry, become the head of the Christian religion, and all countries of

the world full of Christians. They believed, although they were hunted down everywhere, condemned to wheel and sword, crucified, thrown to lions and tigers, cut down in thousands, flayed, and roasted alive, and exposed to every imaginable kind of cruelty; yet “they believed,” nevertheless, “the faith was spread abroad.” Such is the result of the great work which the twelve fishermen began. It is believed in everywhere, believed in constantly, believed in up to the present moment.

And now I challenge all who have the use of right reason, and I ask them if any one, after having considered all these circumstances, can ever imagine that the beginning, progress, spread, and duration of such a religion can be a mere natural work; if it can come from any one but the Almighty God himself? For my part, I can say to God: “Lord! if there is an error in what we believe, we are deceived by thee, because this religion is endowed with wondrous signs that can come only from thee.” If this religion is founded by thee, it cannot be false; it must be that Church of which thou hast said that no power nor the gates of hell shall ever prevail against it, and therefore it has remained constant to the truth in which it commenced; it could not admit error, for otherwise it would be overthrown in an instant; if it could not admit error, it never required reformation or improvement, so that it is true and must remain true; consequently, all those who have abandoned that religion, or who embrace another form of belief, are not in the true Christian Church, which alone can lead to eternal happiness.

But why have I undertaken this unnecessary labor, you will probably think; what good is it to us, what profit are we to draw from it, why do you speak so to us? Do you think that we have perjured ourselves, or that we are wavering in the Catholic faith, since you make such efforts to convince us of its truth? You might preach your sermon in Turkey, or in Japan, amongst heathens, or at least amongst heretics; it would suit them much better. We are all good Christians here, praise be to God! We believe in the old, Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman faith, and we have never doubted of its truth. It is all true, my dear brethren, and you must forgive me I have not considered the matter enough, and it seems to me that I forgot, at first, that I preach to Catholics.

Yet, what am I thinking about? On reconsidering the matter, my dear brethren, I must say that my object is not unsuited, or out of place; it is perhaps only too well adapted to some. Although all of you are Christians and Catholics, although all are convinced of the truth of our religion, yet all do not, so to say, believe in its truth: for what proof do we give that we live according to the truths of our religion? How do our works agree with our faith? We believe and profess one thing, we do and practice another; we are and profess to be Christians, and yet we often live in vice of all kinds, just as if we were the worst of heathens; What do I say! if we really were heathens and knew nothing of the Christian law, it would be no great wonder if, carried away by our wicked nature and evil inclinations, we cared for nothing but satisfying the lusts and desires of the flesh. But to profess and acknowledge such a religion, whose laws are so holy, and at the same time to show nothing of its holiness in our manners and actions; a holiness which makes humility the foundation of the Christian life, while we do not wish to hear of humiliations; a holiness which tells us to take up our cross and bear it patiently after Christ, while we fear the cross as we do the foul fiend; a holiness which commands us to live in meekness, unity, and love with one another, as brethren and children of the one Father, while we live in bitterness, hatred and enmity with each other, and refuse to tolerate the least injury; a holiness which tells us to keep our bodies pure and holy, while we dishonor them by foul passions; which tells us to begin and end everything in the name of Jesus, and our mouths and hearts are full of oaths and curses; that is, indeed, a subject for the greatest wonder, for, instead of living according to the truths of our faith, we rather trample them under foot, worse than the heathens.

Let us hear how St. Augustine represents the Christian Church as complaining of those who are Christians in name only: “Alas! my children,” says this mother, “how many persecutions have I not suffered in the first years of my existence! Yet they have not been able to overcome me; I have always been victorious; tyrants have taken the lives of my children, but they could not take away their hearts from me: their limbs were cut in pieces, their bodies were burnt, yet all that could not induce them to stretch forth their hands and offer incense to false gods. Those were days of combat and repeated victories; but now, in times of peace, when there are no tyrants, nor executioners, no rack, no torture, what a condition I am in, oh, Christians! and where are ye, oh, true-hearted Christians! How many there are who profess to be my children, and who in reality persecute and harrass me with their works? How many there are who require very little threatening or punishment to induce them to give themselves up body and soul to creatures? Nay, even a slight pleasure or trivial gain can lead them to that act of treachery. How often have I suffered! I repeat it; all the persecutions I suffered in my youth, all that heresies

have caused me to suffer since, have not prevailed against me; but the enemies that I now have to contend with I nourish in my own house, and the more they appear to be my friends, the more dangerous they are.”

My Christian friends, let us at all events not give any reason for this complaint to be made against us; let us not depart from the sublime spirit of our religion. We are ready to believe its truths to the last moment of our lives, but our lives must harmonize with the laws of our faith; otherwise, what can we expect from the religion that is given to us, but which we dishonor? Alas! what excuse can we offer when God reproaches us, because the faith that the idolatry and heathenism of the most cruel monsters could not overcome, has not been able to destroy the false maxims of the vain world in us, or to root up those evil habits that have taken possession of us? Let us practice what we believe. Let us manifest the purity of our faith by the purity of our lives. Amen.

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