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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

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Sins of Christians

“Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” St. Matthew 5:20

If it is sufficient to exclude a Christian eternally from the kingdom of heaven if he is not more just and perfect than the Scribes and Parisees, who were looked upon by the Jews as the highest pattern of justice, what kind of damnation, then, awaits those who, instead of living holier and more perfect lives, live more impiously and irreligiously than the Pharisees, Jews, and heathens in former times? That is, however, the complaint that may be justly made in our times. It would not be difficult for me to prove that the vices of the Pharisees are found amongst Christians, in a far worse degree and more frequently; that is to say, that Christians are prouder, more hypocritical, more avaricious and unjust than the Pharisees were. But I will not confine my subject within such narrow limits as to render it applicable to only one or another of you. I shall seek a wider field, and prove what is applicable to all of us, that a sin committed by a Christian under the New Law is greater and more inexcusable than the same sin would be if committed by a Jew or a heathen. That is

I. The sin of a Christian is greater and more inexcusable than that of a Jew or a heathen, on account of the greater light and helps he receives from God,

II. The sin of a Christian is greater than that of a Jew or a heathen on account of the stricter obligation he is under to serve God more holily.

No matter who we are, we must all, according to the end of our creation, travel the same road to eternal happiness. In former times Jews and heathens wished to go to heaven, just as we Catholics do now, and the way thither is not less slippery, difficult, and dangerous for us than it was for them. It is true that no one was ever without the light necessary to distinguish good from evil, nor without the divine assistance necessary to enable him to avoid dangers, and to save himself from a fall; and therefore I will not excuse the Jews and heathens so far as to say that they could not be blamed for living a bad life and committing sin; if they did so, it was their own fault, and a just God could always say to them: “Thy perdition is from thyself, oh, Israel.” Still, there is a great difference between light and light, between helps and helps. What a small, flickering candle, so to speak, was borne before the former in the dark night, while a clear day and the full blaze of the sun is shining on us Christians! How sparingly and how seldom did they receive the means and opportunities of learning, knowing,

and doing good; how lavishly and how often those helps are given into our hands, and how much easier we can recover ourselves after a fall into sin than they could!

And with regard to the light, could not a heathen or a Jew excuse himself, to a certain extent, on the day of judgment, by pleading his ignorance and saying: I have wandered from the way of justice and sinned; I did not know better at the time; I was taught by hidden figures and parables, which I did not understand, and I had hardly any one to explain them to me. But how could a Catholic plead ignorance as an excuse for his sins, and say that he did not know enough?

You, Catholic Christians, who have been taught all these truths, not by figures and mystic prophecies, but by the clear Word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, interpreted according to its true sense and meaning by an infallible Church, explained by so many holy Fathers and Doctors, and rendered so easy for your intelligence and appreciation by so many sermons and instructions, just as food is prepared for a child to eat; and you are besides encouraged, and almost forced to observe this Gospel and to live according to it, by so many warnings and exhortations, by the reading of good books, by the examples of the Saints. How could you, Christians, if you go astray, plead ignorance as an excuse, since the way is thus smoothed before you and you have nothing to do but what you can plainly see before your eyes, while you have Jesus Christ, your Saviour, to go in front and lead you onward, so that your task is simply to do your best to imitate his life, which is proposed to all Christians as a pattern, and which is the infallible and only way to heaven? Oh, certainly not! "They have no excuse for their sin" (John 15:22). So said Christ formerly of the Jews; much more could he say it nowadays of us Christians, who receive so many lights. We sin, not through ignorance, but through a perverse and rebellious will. We are not merely transgressors, like the Jews, but we also condemn and scoff at the Law of God. Like obstinate and disobedient servants, who know their master's will and do not do it, when we commit sin our guilt is greater and more difficult to be excused.

It was more excusable in a Jew if he could not forget or forgive an injury. For in those days what heroic example had men seen to encourage them in that respect? They thought that the law obliged them to love their friends, but not their enemies. They took as their chief maxim that imaginary law of which Christ afterwards said: "It was said to the ancients, thou shalt hate thy enemy" (St. Matthew 5), "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." And therefore, when they afterwards saw the first Christians, they looked upon them with astonishment. See, they said, how these men love one another; what extraordinary people they are! But a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ, brought up in the school of the cross, who so often hears from the lips of his master the words: "But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you;" a Christian, who knows well that his Lord and God suffered on the cross for those who tortured and murdered him, how could such a one palliate or excuse his secret spite and hatred, his vindictiveness and jealousy, when he tries to supplant his neighbor, his cursing and calumny when he gives expression to his bitter hatred against his fellow-man?

Is it wonderful that in former times a heathen or a Jew should surrender himself to impurity, sensuality, gluttony, or drunkenness? Such is the question that Tertullian puts to those who, in his time, appealed to the Old Law to palliate and excuse their self-indulgence. In the Old Law there was nothing known of perpetual chastity, and perpetual virginity was looked upon as a disgrace to a family; even the most holy men were allowed a plurality of wives. "Let the flesh have its way, before the coming of Christ," answered Tertullian. "It was not yet worthy of such a great gift as chastity," because it was not yet purified by the Incarnate Word of God, nor washed in his Blood by Baptism and thus raised to a more pure and perfect life. It had not yet been adorned with those glorious titles; "it had not yet been called the body of Christ, the members of Christ, the house of God, the temple of the Holy Ghost." And all these titles now belong to our bodies, since God was born of an immaculate Virgin and clothed himself with our flesh. Therefore the apostle warns us so energetically that we must hold our bodies in the highest honor, and treat them as becomes the Body of Christ, and that we must not even name sins of impurity, or dishonor by one bad thought a body that is sanctified by and through Christ. If the old written Law, nay, even the natural law, considers sins of impurity as so grievous that, on their account, an angry God destroyed whole cities and countries, like Sodom and Gomorrha, and deluged the whole earth and drowned every human creature on it, except a few just souls, and condemned the majority, if not all of them, to hell forever; how abominable, intolerable, and inexcusable in the eyes of God must not the impurity of a Christian be who is a member of Christ and a temple of God?

If the Jewish women dressed in such a vain, frivolous and indecent style as is now the diabolical custom in

many Christian countries, there might have been some little excuse for them; for they knew nothing of the lowly, humble Gospel of Jesus Christ, nor of the woe that he announces: "Woe to the man by whom scandal cometh;" no matter how the scandal may be given. Nor did they know anything of the new fashion that the apostles, Peter and Paul, introduced amongst Christian women. St. Paul writes: "I desire, therefore, that women dress in decent apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair, or gold or pearls" (1 Tim. 2:9). How St. Paul would have thundered forth if he saw the fashions of the world in these days, which cause those who are modest and wish to preserve pure hearts to close their eyes!

Besides all this, we have so many helps and opportunities to avoid evil, do good and save our souls. Poor people! I sometimes think, poor people, who formerly lived in Judaism or heathenism, how ill off you were compared to us Christians! Their Sacraments were only a shadow, a figure of ours, and from them they received the grace of God drop by drop, while we can receive it now, if we wish, like a rushing torrent. If one of them had offended God grievously, he had no other means of gaining eternal happiness but perfect contrition, along with suffering the terrible punishments generally inflicted on sin; while we can be absolved from our sins so easily in the Sacrament of Penance, and may be freed by indulgences from the punishment due to them. They had nothing as a sacrifice of atonement for sin but the flesh of rams and goats, while we have the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ, an infinite Sacrifice, to offer daily to the Eternal Father on the altar. For them the Lord, as a stern judge, had an iron rod always ready in his hand, when a more serious crime was, generally speaking, immediately followed by the terrible punishment of eternal death; while he deals with us like a mother, who will take the rod in her hands twenty times to threaten, but hardly once to strike. In a word, they were treated as servants and slaves of God; we have the great honor of being brethren of Christ. We are called children of God. But, precisely on this account, I must look at the matter in another light, and say: miserable, wretched Christians! why should you not live holier and love your God more than the Jews and heathens did? How much more inexcusable you are, how much more deserving of punishment, when you deliberately offend your God! So it is; a single sin, committed by us Christians, makes a deeper wound in the Sacred Heart than twenty sins of a Jew or heathen, on account of the greater lights and helps that we receive from God. The same is to be said also on account of the stricter contract that we have made with God, to serve him more holily.

II. Much greater and more hurtful is the injury that I, deservedly and without cause, suffer from a dear friend, who has sworn constant love and fidelity to me, than that which I suffer from a stranger, who has nothing in common with me, except that we are fellow-men. And that is self-evident. All men, no matter who they are, owe to their Creator a most submissive obedience, respect, and love. No one is excused from this or dispensed from it in the least. This duty is enforced by nature itself. But a Christian is more bound by this duty than other men. And why? Because he, in addition to the obligation incumbent on all men and enforced by nature itself, has bound himself, by a special and higher title, to the constant love and service of his God. Think, Christians, of the irrevocable contract that you have made with God in holy Baptism, in which he promised to consider you as his children, and you undertook to give him due honor and obedience, as your Father. You then publicly, and in presence of witnesses, protested, with a solemn oath, that you would have nothing to do during your whole lives with the devil and his works and pomps, or with the flesh or the corrupt usages of the world, and that you would always remain faithful to your God. This contract is strengthened by subsequent confessions and communions, although not in express words, yet implicitly it is ratified, approved of, and renewed. No Pharisee, or Jew, or heathen, ever made such a contract with God.

And yet if any of these latter transgressed the divine law they were not to be excused, and were deserving of the eternal punishment of hell. How enormous, then, must your sin be, Catholics! When you sin you do not merely despise the command of God, like a Jew or a heathen, but you also commit a spiritual adultery, and you are guilty of perjury and rebellion against your rightful Lord, to whom you have, in a special manner, solemnly and publicly sworn eternal fidelity. Oh, what a terrible thing it is, says the Lord himself: "Shall he prosper and gain his salvation, who does such things?" "Shall he go unpunished, who has violated a contract?" (Ezech. 17:15.) For a Catholic, who has publicly renounced Satan and his works, and given himself soul and body to God, to imitate heathens in sinning, for a Catholic to commit grievous crimes, that is no ordinary violation of the divine Law; it is a spiritual apostasy, an idolatry, an adultery, and a denial of God.

If Jews and heathens are damned on account of their sins, as the Lord declares in the Gospel of St. John: "They have no excuse for their sin" (John 15:22); what has an impious Catholic to expect, who enjoys such

perfect light, such frequent helps and graces, such a close connection and relationship with God? If it is true that we cannot enter heaven unless our justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, what kind of a heaven can we expect, or rather, what sort of a hell awaits us, if we are not merely not more perfect and just, but even more vicious and sinful than they? A good Catholic is a branch that grows on the vine, which is Christ: "I am the vine and you are the branches". As long as he is united to Christ he brings forth good fruit that is pleasing in the sight of God. On the other hand a wicked Catholic, as soon as he cuts himself off from the vine by a mortal sin, is far worse and more useless than an infidel. Why? Because, when he is enlightened by the grace of faith, the Lord can make him into a vessel of honor in his house, that is in the Church, to show his power and goodness; but a false Catholic, a Catholic only in name, who lives according to the world and the flesh, is a disgrace; so that, being cut off from the vine, if he does not repent, he is good for nothing but hell-fire. "If he is not on the vine, he will be in the fire." Such is the threat of our Lord: "And I say to you that many will come from the east and the west," and will condemn you, for they have led better lives with less light and grace than you, and many of them will one day enter the kingdom of heaven. "But the children of the kingdom," who had a right to heaven by belonging to the true Church, "will be cast out into the exterior darkness" (St. Matthew 8:11).

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