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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

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Worthlessness of a Death Bed Repentance

*"Go first to be reconciled to thy brother."* Matt. 5:24.

Oh, sinner! You are living at variance and enmity with God! Yet you hope and desire one day to offer your soul into his hands, to die a happy death, and to go to heaven. But you have something to do first; "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). And when do you mean to do that? After a while? Ah, that is too dangerous. At the end, in your last illness? Oh, that is far worse; your state will be even desperate then! Go first and be reconciled to your God. When death is at hand it will be too late; God himself denies you all hope of conversion then, and experience denies it you also. But why should repentance in the last moment be such a desperate chance? God is still as merciful and desirous of our salvation as he ever was, and the human will is still free, and can then change itself, and, moreover, penance has still the same efficacy in obtaining pardon from God. Do you ask why? I will tell you:

- I. The grace of true conversion and a happy death is far too great for the sinner to expect in his last illness.*
- II. The sick man is then far too weak to be able to correspond with the grace of God and to repent sincerely.*

I. The grace that enables a man to arise from the state of sin and to be truly converted, is a powerful, special grace, coming from the goodness of God alone, a grace that he is not bound to give to any one. Therefore, he who has transgressed the commandments in a serious matter has good reason to beg from God most humbly the grace of true repentance. The grace of conversion at the last moment, the grace of final perseverance, and a happy death is the most excellent of all; it is one that no man, no matter how holy his life has been, with all his good works, can merit in the strict acceptation of the term. And you, oh, sinner! Expect all this powerful and almost miraculous grace? And from whom do you expect it? From an angry God, whom you have provoked a thousand times, and whose patience you have worn out? When do you expect it? When you have spent your life in all kinds of wickedness; constantly kept your ears shut to God's inspirations, despised his warnings and threats, trampled so often on the precious blood he shed for you; when you see that you are on the point of leaving the world and entering into eternity? When you are tired of sin, or, to speak more truly, when you are no longer able to sin? When you have no more time left to serve God? Then he has to be ready for you, and give you the greatest and most powerful of all graces that he has ever given to his Saints who are in heaven? What are you dreaming of? Where is your reason? Where is your common sense?

As you are lying on your bed of sickness, pray as fervently as you know how for that grace; your own despairing conscience will give you the same answer that Samuel gave the unhappy Saul. The latter was surrounded by his enemies; he knew not what to do, and in his anguish he cried out to the dead prophet: Oh, Samuel, holy Prophet! Help me in my necessity; "I am in great distress; for the Philistines fight against me; ... therefore I have called thee that thou mayest show me what I shall do." "Why askest thou me?" was the answer,

“seeing the Lord has departed from thee?” “He will rend thy kingdom out of thy hand... And the Lord also will deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines,” and tomorrow you and your sons shall be slain, “because thou didst not obey the voice of the Lord” (1 Kings 28:15, 19). Your conscience, oh, sinner! Will make you the same reproach on your death-bed. What do you ask or desire in your anguish from that Lord whom you have made your enemy, refusing to be reconciled to him during life, and remaining his enemy till death? When the merciful God offered you the grace of repentance you should have cried out to him; then you might have confessed your sins, and having begun to amend your life, have humbly begged for the grace of perseverance and a happy death. But in vain do you now expect that favor from your bitter enemy. But you need not wait long to find out all about this; today you will be in eternity, and then you will see how matters stand. Hear the words of our Lord himself: “Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord. And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22, 23). So did God act towards the wicked Israelites, when in the time of their affliction they said: Arise, and deliver us, he answered them: Where are thy gods, whom thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee in the time of thy affliction” (Jer. 2:27, 23). Sinner, you shall also hear those words in your extremity! Where are the gods you have adored and honored in your lifetime? Where are the idols, oh, unchaste man! Whom you loved more than me? Where is your wealth, oh, miser! That you looked on as your god? “Let them arise and deliver thee in the time of thy affliction;” call now upon those gods of yours, and see if they can save you from hell! You have not known me during your life neither will I know you now in your death.

You shall be asked, when you pray for grace at the end of your life: Do you now seek for time to repent, when you have finished the time of your life? What have you been doing all these years? God has given you time enough to prepare for death. You have seen many other Christians go to Holy Communion almost every month; did you ever take the trouble to receive it once a year? You have heard so many sermons; have you ever tried to profit by them and to amend your life? You have often seen the confessional ready to receive you and relieve you of the burden of your sins; have you ever even once made a candid confession with true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment? What were you doing from morning till night but spending your time in pleasures and pastimes and in the pursuit of temporal gain, heaping sin on sin, as if God had given you time only for that purpose? And now, when time is no more for you, you ask for an opportunity to make good the great loss? No, that cannot be; your prayer cannot be granted. Ah, unhappy man! Do not trust to a future repentance, which is to be when you see that you are about to die. Supposing, however, that there will then be still room for you in the divine mercy, and that God will not refuse you the powerful grace of conversion, yet on your own side all hopes of salvation must vanish; for then you shall be neither disposed nor able to work with the grace of God so as to be truly converted.

II. He who thinks that he will be able to repent sincerely at the end of an ill-spent life shows that he does not understand what is meant by sincere repentance. It is easy enough to confess your sins, and if the priest asks you whether you are heartily sorry for having offended the good God, to answer yes, and if he further inquires whether you wish to be absolved and to receive the last Sacraments, to say yes to that, too. But is that sufficient to obtain pardon of your sins? If such were the case, how many Christians would be in heaven who are actually burning in hell! Do you wish to know what it means to do true penance? It is to love sincerely and earnestly what you before hated against the law of God; to hate what you before loved contrary to the divine will, and to detest, curse and reprobate all such unlawful thoughts, words and actions; to love God more than all joys, goods, honors and creatures in the world; to hate and detest your sins more than all imaginable evils, pains and troubles in the world, nay, more than death itself, and all that from a supernatural motive. Is it likely that such a sudden change will take place, and that one who has grown old in vice, who has loved sin all his life, and who is leaving it now through force, nay, who would not leave it if he had not death before his eyes; who has seldom made an act of the love of God, or of supernatural sorrow; who, while he was strong and healthy, had such frequent opportunities of repenting with the full force of his reason, and who, instead of using them, said: I cannot give up sin now; I cannot yet amend my life; I cannot do penance for a while longer; is it likely, I ask, that a man of that kind will change so suddenly as to do sincere penance in so short a time, and at such an inconvenient time, too?

When a large door has been kept fast bolted for twenty years or more without being opened, so that its hinges are rusted, can a weak man open it at once? Not by any means. “Behold,” the Almighty has often said before to

such a dying man, “I stand at the gate and knock; if any man shall hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come in to him” (Apoc. 3:20). Now, after all the knocking for so many years, the sinner could not make up his mind to open the door of his heart to the Lord by true repentance, so that it has become, as it were, quite rusted; how, then, will he be able to open it in a hurry when he hears death knocking? Ah, it cost St. Augustine the labor of twelve whole years to combat himself and overcome his evil inclinations and bad habits, and at last it required almost a miracle to change him. Can the dying sinner expect that miracle in the short time that remains to him when he is told that he is in a dangerous state and must die? No, indeed! He will be like so many others, who died with the bad habits and desires in which they lived.

Such people do not even dream of doing penance; and if they attempt it, how could they manage it successfully at so unsuitable a time? For when the weakened body is filled with pain and anguish the sick man’s only thought is how to procure some alleviation; the doctor is at hand to prescribe medicines for him; his friends are there to see that he is in as comfortable a position as possible and to prevent others from wearying him by talk; his mind is filled with fear, anxiety, care and terror on account of having to leave the world and bid adieu to his sorrowing relations. He is so disturbed at the approach of death that, as experience tells us, he is hardly able to say a Hail Mary with due devotion. The sick man will agree to all the priest says to him; he will express sorrow for his sins; he will kiss the crucifix; he will pray for forgiveness and receive absolution, Holy Communion, Extreme Unction, and the general absolution. Do you think, therefore, that he must die well? But what else could a Christian do? Do you imagine he must throw away the crucifix with disgust; refuse to express sorrow for his sins, to receive absolution or Holy Communion? No Catholic would act in that way unless he were mad and out of his senses. But do you believe that he does all those pious actions with sincerity and from a supernatural motive? No; the dying man does not know at all what he does and says. It is easy to get an echo even from the hardest rocks and mountains. Call out the name of Jesus between the rocks, and they will answer Jesus; not because they understand what they say, but because the echo gives back your voice. So it is generally with such dying people. When a man lives a bad life, and puts off conversion till the last moment, what else is his heart but a rock hardened against the grace of God? Now, a man of this kind is lying on his sick bed; you go to him and say: Jesus! He answers: Jesus! You say: Mary, Mother of mercy! He repeats: Mary, Mother of mercy! Are you not sorry that you have offended God? Yes; I am sorry. If you should be restored to health, will you not serve him faithfully? Yes; I will! You wish to go to heaven? Yes. Oh, my God, I believe in thee! Oh, my God, I believe in thee! I hope in thee! I hope in thee! I love thee! I love thee! There is nothing more that troubles your conscience? No; nothing more. A person looking on at this might be inclined to say: Thanks be to God! He is well prepared! Simple-minded man! It was, after all, but an echo from the hard rock you heard, and the sick man’s sighs and tears were caused merely by bodily pain. If you do not believe this ask all those who have received the last Sacraments in a dangerous illness and have recovered again how they felt on the occasion. Many will tell you that they felt quite stupid; the most will acknowledge that they hardly knew whether they were receiving the Sacraments or not. If those people had died they would have been considered as having been well prepared. Well prepared, indeed!

“Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good” (Gal. 6:10). Now, whilst we are sound in mind and body, let us make use of the golden opportunity and serve God zealously! We must not trust to the time of sickness. Sinners! Now that you can do it conveniently, be converted sincerely to God! You must not imagine that what I have said concerns you little, as none of you may be minded to defer repentance till the last moment, and all of you may be resolved to repent before the hour of death, although not at once. Ah! I believe you. But almost all those who have been surprised by death in the state of sin have been of the same mind as you are now. They have said to themselves: On some future occasion I will go to confession and amend my life; bye-and-bye I will begin to serve God faithfully; until at last, before their bye-and-bye came, they fell into a mortal illness, so that in reality they deferred repentance to the hour of death. “Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not the Son of man will come” (Luke 12:40). Delay no longer! Prepare now while you have the time of grace to dispose of. Think what depends on this. Nothing less than the eternal fire of hell, in which you will burn, if the Lord, when he comes for you at the hour of death, does not find you prepared. Nothing less than the eternal happiness of heaven depends on it if you repent sincerely and amend in time. Amen.

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