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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. 2 = The Penitent Christian

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

Confession an Easy Means of Salvation.

*“Beware of false prophets.”* St. Matthew 7:55.

The devil is the father of lies. After ensnaring souls into sin by representing to them the sinful object in a pleasing light, when they wish to free themselves from it and the accompanying tortures of remorse, Satan strives to make them believe that it is most difficult, almost impossible for them to do penance and to make a good confession; so that sinners are frightened into deferring confession from day to day, and from month to month, and meanwhile they go on adding sin to sin, until their consciences become hardened in wickedness, and finally give up all idea of repentance. Ah sinners, do not believe the traitor! Go at once to confession, and acknowledge your sins with sorrow of heart. Today, for the encouragement of sinners and to induce them to repent speedily, I am prepared to show that *Sacramental confession is an easy means for the sinner to regain God's favor*;

*I. Because of the effects, and*

*II. Because of the nature of this Sacrament.*

I. How (you ask) can confession be an easy means for the sinner? Easy indeed! Easy enough for pious souls, who go to confession every week, and have nothing to tell but half-voluntary distractions in prayer, slight fits of bad temper, carelessness in speech, a few idle words here and there, and similar imperfections. But for the sinner who has far more grievous matter to tell, whose sins are almost countless, who is buried in vice of all kinds, who has grown old in wickedness, and has to give an account of years of a vicious life, for him to kneel down and go over his sins one by one, according to their different natures, and as they were committed in thought, word, or deed: the very thought of it is enough to make one shiver. A more terrible rack could not be invented for any malefactor, than the confessional is in such circumstances for the sinner. True, if we consider the matter superficially, and as it is apt to appear at first sight, it may seem difficult; but think what a terrible burden it frees you from; how fearful the evil from which it releases you, and you will have to acknowledge that the difficulty is small indeed.

In what a dangerous state you are when in mortal sin! One who was a sinner like you, King David, hear him cry out to God “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak: heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled, and my soul is troubled exceedingly. Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me, for thy mercy's sake. For there is no one in death that is mindful of thee; and who shall confess to thee in hell?” (Ps. 6:3, 6.) Here is a

lamentable state indeed, yet it is the state in which you are; for you are suffering from an illness that, unless you are cured of it, will certainly bring you to eternal death. Do you understand what it is to be an enemy of the almighty God, to be separated from God, and to live under God's hatred and malediction. Such is your condition at present; you are a bond-slave of the cruel demons, who are eagerly awaiting a sign from their Creator to hurry you down to the abyss of hell. You have no more claim to the kingdom of heaven; all you are entitled to is eternal confusion, eternal hunger and thirst, eternal stench, and the eternal flames of hell. See now if there is anything too difficult for you to do, in order to be freed from such a dangerous illness, and (so to speak), from such an endless evil. It would certainly be but right that you, a miserable worm of the earth, who have dared to offend the infinite Majesty, should perform all those imaginable austerities during your whole life, in order to appease God's anger against you! Certainly, it would not be an excessive satisfaction, nay, it would not be enough to compensate for the insults you have offered God. And if you had to practice mortifications till the last day, you should still look on it as a great favor to be thus enabled to escape the fire of hell, to free your soul from sin, and to regain God's grace and favor, and your forfeited right to eternal happiness. What is required to regain God's grace and escape hell? Nothing but to secretly confess your sins with true sorrow to one man. Remember, this, O sinners; no matter how often or how grievously you have offended God; all that he requires of you, in order to forgive you, is that you truly repent of your sins, and make a good confession. If you had offended a mere mortal like yourselves, could you offer him a smaller satisfaction than this?

Consider the example of the leper in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "Lord," he sighed, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (St. Matthew 8:2). And what did our compassionate Lord do? "And Jesus, stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will. Be thou made clean" (Ibid. 3). Hardly had he spoken these words, when the man's illness disappeared at once: "And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed" (Ibid.). If we had been present on that occasion, and had seen that sudden cure, what would we have thought of it? Would we not have cried out in astonishment "A miracle, a miracle?" God works a similar miracle every day for the salvation of souls. Am I suffering from a spiritual leprosy, so that I am sick to death? Have I been in that woeful state for thirty, forty, or more years? God has prepared for me in the Sacrament of Penance a medicine that will cure me perfectly the first time I take it? The moment I confess my sins, and hear the words of absolution, the cure is completed; forthwith, my leprosy is cleansed. From being sick unto death, I am fully restored to health, as if nothing had ever been the matter with me. From being God's enemy, I have become his just and holy friend, and he assures me that he will never for all eternity remember my sins again. And shall I regard this means as too hard or too disagreeable?

In a dangerous illness of the body one has not always a doctor at hand. Often, he is sent for at the critical crisis two, three, four times, and is not found at home; frequently, he cannot come because he is engaged elsewhere; and when he does come, he prescribes a costly medicine, that entails a great deal of expense; a long time is required to prepare it at the apothecary's. All these circumstances increase the difficulty of the cure. Much easier and quicker, O sinner is your cure of a spiritual malady. All you have to do is to come and acknowledge your sins in confession, and you are cured. The medicine does not cost you a farthing; you get absolution for nothing; no more time is required than is necessary for the priest to pronounce the sacramental words; and nearly every where you go, you have all these opportunities at hand. Pitiful was the state of the paralytic man at the pool in Jerusalem. For thirty-eight years he had lain there, and no one, on account of the great crowd of sick people that thronged the place, had come to put him into the water. Therefore, he said to our Lord: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pond; for whilst I am coming, another goeth down before me" (St. John 5:7)

This pond was a figure of our Sacrament of Penance. Sinners, do you complain that you have no man to whom you can confess your sins? no man who can absolve you from them? In truth, if Christ had so willed, he could have given that power to no one but his vicar on earth, so that a long journey would be necessary in order to get forgiveness of our sins. But our Lord did not confine his mercy within such narrow limits. Every Catholic town throughout the world is full of approved priests, who can, and, if we go properly to work, will help us in this matter.

Sinner, do you still regard this means as too difficult? Then, if so, you do not know the misery of the state in which you are; you do not understand what it is to be saved from eternal flames; nor do you attach any importance to your salvation. But let us consider the matter more closely. In what does the imaginary great

difficulty consist? I have proved that the Sacrament of Penance is easy as to its effects; for it frees the sinner from an immense evil quickly, surely, and easily, and the opportunity of receiving it is always at hand. I may add that the Sacrament of Penance is an easy means as well in regard to its own nature, as I shall now proceed to show.

II. All God asks of the sinner in the Sacrament of Penance is the *examination of conscience, a true sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, the confession of his sins, and the fulfillment of the penance enjoined him*. That is all. What terrible difficulty is there about it? The examination of conscience? What is easier than for me to remember what I have been doing for many years against God and his law? Perhaps the sorrow for past sin, or the purpose of amendment, is the difficulty? But these things are in the power of my own free will, with the help of God's grace, which is never wanting to me, if I earnestly desire it. If I am only sincere about changing my sinful life, there is nothing easier than to repent of and detest that by which I know I have offended so good a God, and deserved hell-fire. In the Old Law, if a sinner wished to obtain forgiveness, he had to excite a perfect sorrow through the motive of a perfect love of God; but now, in the Sacrament of Penance, God is satisfied with an imperfect sorrow, which requires far less trouble than the first, so that the Lord receives his rebellious children back again into his favor, even when they return to him through love of their own interest, that is, through fear of eternal punishment, or hope of an eternal reward. Is the difficulty perhaps in the performance of the penance enjoined? But how could that be? It is the practice of most confessors nowadays, and that, too, with good reason, to impose such slight penances, that, compared with the enormity of the sins confessed, they hardly deserve the name of penance.

So it seems, then, that the whole of the terrible difficulty consists in the confession of one's sins? Yes, this it is, which makes many a strong man shudder, fills him with fear and anguish, so that he can hardly articulate, while he trembles in every limb of his body, especially when he has very shameful or disgraceful sins to confess. This it is, that people fear, as if it were a burning furnace, through which they had to go to a painful death. But let us consider the matter reasonably, and we shall see that the cause of this anxiety is merely imaginary, and, therefore, that the difficulty is not a real one; at all events, that it is not half as terrible as people think. For, when I am going to confession, even if I have the most horrible sins to tell, I myself am my own accuser. And *who* is he to whom I have to make my accusation? A man like myself. What sort of a sentence have I to expect? If I do my part all right, none but a favorable one, by which I shall be justified. Ought not this consideration console me and lessen the shame of my avowal?

If I had to listen to others making charges against me, and disclosing all my disgraceful actions to a judge in the presence of others; then, indeed, I should have cause to blush for shame; for my accusers might exaggerate my guilt through malice, hatred, envy, or vindictiveness. But as it is, I am my own accuser, and that, too, of my own free will, through love of God, and the desire of saving my soul. I am the only one to say a word against myself, and implicit confidence must be placed in what I say, nor shall I be under any necessity of appealing to any one else. There are no witnesses required, no counselors; the whole affair is conducted between me and my judge, and the examination and sentence are profoundly secret.

Again, if God were to send an angel, or a seraph down from heaven, to hear my confession, in visible shape, then, indeed, I might have reason to feel anxious and afraid; because the angel not being a creature of flesh, nor subject like me to sin and passion, nor ever having experienced human weaknesses, allurements and temptations to sin, would have no pity for me. But the good God has appointed as my judge one who is in all respects like myself, who has the same nature, the same inclinations, miseries, weaknesses, and is exposed to the same temptations that assail me, who can sin as I do, and perhaps has committed more numerous and grievous sins than I have; so that he can and must have compassion on my frailty. Hence, St. Paul says, by way of consolation, to all sinners: "Every high-priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God ... who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and that err: because he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:1, 2). Besides, (so each of you may say to himself): I can choose whom I will among those who are empowered to act as my judge; I can select one who does not know and has never seen me; I am not obliged to tell him my name; I can go to him early in the morning or late in the evening, so that he cannot see me; and, if I wish, I can cover my face.

To this judge, I must declare the sins I have committed, and that but once during my whole life; for when I have once confessed them properly, I shall never be obliged to confess them again. In addition to this, God has

taken such great care of my good name, that he has bound this judge under pain of hell-fire to the strictest secrecy, so that in no imaginable circumstances, not even to save his life, nor to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the whole world, to save many thousand souls from eternal damnation, can that judge ever reveal to any one a single sin he hears from me, either by word or sign. Not only that, but he is not allowed to speak of it to myself, unless he has first asked and obtained my permission to speak with me outside of confession, after he has given me absolution, of what I have told him. So that my sin is better hidden with him, than it is with myself; for I might make it known to others, through talkativeness, or in confidence, or in order to humble myself, whilst my confessor dare not attempt such a thing. My conscience may often reproach me with the sins I have committed; my confessor can never do so. This is an undoubted fact, and there is neither law, nor dispensation, nor power in the whole world, which can ever free a confessor from this obligation of silence. How could God have made confession easier or more consoling?

Finally, he who is appointed by God as my judge holds the place of God, not to condemn, but to absolve me ; not to reject, but to receive me; and when I have finished my accusation, and am otherwise in the proper dispositions, the sentence that I have a right to is my justification, and it is passed in these words: "I absolve you;" I remit all the debt you have contracted with God; I loose the chains that bind you in the slavery of the devil; I open the dungeon in which you are imprisoned, and allow you to go forth free; I blot out your name from the book of eternal death, and write it in the book of eternal life; you may now go in peace, you are innocent and holy, a beloved friend and child of God, and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. All this is comprised in that short sentence: "I absolve you." therefore, you must be convinced that the Sacrament of Penance is not, as some imagine, a hard and difficult, but rather an easy and most consoling way of escaping eternal damnation, and gaining the happiness of heaven.

Come sinners, I conclude, in the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews, "Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace; that we may obtain mercy, and find grace" (Heb. 4:16); that is, let us approach the sacred tribunal of penance, and, without shame or fear, but with penitent hearts, confess our sins candidly. Do not complain that this voluntary confession is too hard for you. When the prophet Eliseus told Naaman to go and wash seven times in the Jordan, in order to be cured of his leprosy, the latter was dissatisfied with the remedy proposed to him. But his servants said to him: "Father, if the prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, surely thou wouldst have done it ; how much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash and thou shalt be clean?" (4 Kings 5:13.) Let you and me, O sinner, take those words to ourselves! If the Lord God had required of us to suffer the torments of hell till the last day, in order to obtain forgiveness of our sins, and to escape eternal fire, certainly we should submit to the condition with joy; much more, then, should we be ready to avail ourselves of the Sacrament of Penance, that easy means that He has prescribed for us, saying to us: Go, and confess your sins only once to the priest, and they will all be forgiven you!

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