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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. III = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

On the Holiness of Our Daily Actions

"*He that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*." St. Matthew 7:21.

To think in the heart, or say with the lips, "Lord, Lord!" to pray, fast, give alms, practice all kinds of devotions, to be enrolled in different sodalities, to honor the Mother of God and the Saints - all these are good works; but they are worth nothing unless that one necessary condition is fulfilled, namely, to do the will of God. He who does that will enter into the kingdom of heaven. This text gives me an opportunity of speaking of the conformity and union of our will with the will of God. This conformity consists first, in this, that man fulfils the will of God and does what God requires of him; and secondly, that man is content with the will of God and readily submits to all that God appoints for him. If I observe these two things, then my will is in full conformity with the divine will. To fulfill the will of God is to do and omit what God wills us to do and omit; to do it or omit it when God wills, how God wills, because God wills, and for no other reason but simply for God's sake; and that is to be observed in everything without exception.

I. *To do and omit what God wills us to do and omit, therein consists Christian piety and holiness.*
II. *But what does God wish each one of us to do and omit?*

If Christian perfection and holiness of life consisted in apparitions, ecstasies, prophecies, healing the sick, raising the dead to life, and other miraculous works, then we should all have reason for despairing of attaining perfection and holiness, and God, who wishes us all to be holy, would require of us what far exceeds the faculties of our nature, and what he gives only to a very few, in order to show forth his power. There are many who have led perfect lives without working miracles. We do not read that St. John the Baptist worked miracles, although, there was none greater than he among all the men born of women. Therefore our Lord assures us that he will not know his elect by that test on the last day: "Many will say to me on that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name?" (St. Matthew 7:22.) But what reward will they receive from him? "And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity" (St. Matthew 7:23).

If to every one who wishes to attain perfection were said the words that our Lord spoke to the young man whom He loved, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (St. Matthew 19:21), then, indeed, most people would go away sorrowful like that young man: "And when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad" (St. Matthew

19:22). Nor would there in that case be any chance of perfection for people living in the world in the different states to which the providence of God has called them, and they would be all obliged to leave their business, their occupations, and whatever other worldly duties they have to attend to, so that the whole world would become a vast convent. No, God wishes that we should try to become perfect and holy in whatever state of life we may be; and therefore this perfection must consist in something that can be found in every state. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were rich; yet these and many others served God in the midst of their wealth, and led lives that were pleasing to him.

If Christian perfection consisted in performing very difficult and extraordinary outward actions, in many long prayers, in sublime meditations, in subtle contemplations, in constant watching, fasting, alms-giving, bodily mortifications, and other austerities, such as we wonder at in the lives of hermits and Religious, there would not be much chance then, either, for most people to attain perfection. For many a one could urge in excuse that he is not strong enough to bear such a heavy burden, and poor beggars and other poverty-stricken people would be badly off, since they have not the means of giving alms, and must rather receive them from others; nor could sick and bedridden people become holy, for they are forbidden to pray, or fast much, or to practice any bodily austerities; and such, too, would be the case with all those whose duties or occupations give them no time, or whose ignorance prevents them from performing those outward works of devotion. Christian perfection. In what does it consist? To live holily nothing more is required than that every one keeps in the state of grace and always does what God wills him to do. This is the sole foundation of all holiness and piety. If I do a good work, it is good because it is in conformity with the will of God; if I do evil it is evil because it is contrary to the will of God. God has neither advantage from our good works nor harm from our evil ones. No matter what we do, we cannot lessen by an iota his infinite happiness, which he has in and of himself, nor can we add anything to it. If all the men that were ever in the world were in hell, and cursing and blaspheming him forever, he would not be less happy. If all the men in the world were in heaven praising and blessing him, he would not be more happy than he is; he would still remain what he is from all eternity. Not he who performs great and extraordinary outward works of piety is to be looked on as the best and most perfect servant of God, but he who in all circumstances does what God wishes him to do, no matter how trifling the thing may be in itself.

Go in thought to the house at Nazareth, and there you will see an evident and, at the same time, a most wonderful example of this in the Holy of holies, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who is the Model and pattern of all virtue and perfection for all men. What was his occupation while dwelling there? “He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them” (St. Luke 2:51). To whom was He subject? To a poor carpenter, his foster-father, and to a young virgin, his mother. In what? In things that were suitable to such a lowly household ; he laid the table, swept out the house, collected the shavings, brought wood to the fire, carried the tools to his foster-father, helped him in his work; in a word, he acted as a servant and apprentice to the trade. Nor did his neighbors look on him in any other light, nor had they any other name for him than that of the carpenter’s son. And were those occupations befitting the Son of God? To sweep out the house, and collect the shavings? Had he nothing better to do? Did he not come down from heaven to renew the whole world, to redeem men, to show them the way to heaven, and to spread everywhere the glory of his Father? Yet behold, he spends the greater part of his life hidden away in a poor hut, and leads a lowly, abject, and apparently useless life. Could he not have made a better use of so much precious time? Could he not have turned his immense wealth of gifts and graces to better account? Why did he not go about the world teaching and instructing, giving good example and proving his divinity by miracles? If he had done so, he might have converted all men, brought them to heaven, and so furthered the glory of his Father, which was the only reason why he became man. Filled with astonishment, then, I ask again, why did he shut himself up in the midst of such lowly occupations for so many years, while the world was quite ignorant that it possessed its God and its Saviour? Ah, my dear brethren, hear what he himself says in explanation of his conduct: “I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me” (St. John 6:38); and again: “For I do always the things that please him” (St. John 8:20). These occupations, which we consider mean, were appointed for him by his heavenly Father at that time; and therefore the Son of God could not find anything that was more pleasing to God, more holy, or more perfect. He honored his Father as much when he was picking up the shavings in the

workshop as when he proclaimed the glory of God in the streets of Jerusalem by his preaching and miracles, for in one thing as well as in the other he fulfilled the divine will. So that the perfection and holiness of the Christian does not consist in great and wonderful deeds, as many imagine, but in doing at all times the will of God.

II. How am I always to know what God wishes me to do at different times and in different places?

Will he reveal his will to me? We must not expect an angel to come from heaven to enlighten us on this point. For we know well enough what the Lord wishes from us. And first, with regard to his commandments and the precepts of the Church, they are public enough and well known, and his wish is that we should keep them inviolably, and not transgress them in the least in thought, word, or deed. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (St. Matthew 19:17). Again, it is God's will that we should be satisfied with all he has ordained for us and those who belong to us, and accept all the accidents of life, whether they be pleasing to us or not, with readiness from his fatherly hand; for, sin alone excepted, nothing happens in the world without the permission or will of God. This holds good for all men. Besides these general laws there are still some special works or omissions that God requires from each individual in particular. And how are we to know what those things are? Let each one look to the state in which God has placed him, and see what are its daily duties and obligations.

These, and nothing else, are what God expects him to fulfill. If you do them well, as it is in your power to do them, you do what God wills; for it was for the purpose of fulfilling those duties that he called you to the state you occupy.

To explain this I will use a simile. You have seen all kinds of personages in a theatre; one struts the stage magnificently dressed as a king, others follow him as his attendants; they who surround him are his soldiers and satellites; on one side there is a peasant, on the other a fool, or a poor beggar. Now, who is the best off among the actors? As long as the play lasts we certainly should say that the king and his lords are best off as regards magnificence of appearance, while it is quite the contrary with the clown and the beggar. But who acts his part best? Who wins most applause from the public? That is a matter in which people do not consider the dress worn, nor the dignity of the character represented, but simply whether the actor does his part well or ill, if the king were to appear clownish, the peasant polite, the beggar proud, the fool clever, none of them would act his part well; the whole piece would be a failure. The more clownish the peasant is, the more miserable the beggar, the more silly the fool, the better the play. And why? Because the characters require to be so represented and thus it happens sometimes that the beggar wins the most applause, because the king and his attendants do not perform their parts properly.

2. We mortals are in this world as on a stage; we are acting a play, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "We are made a spectacle to the world, and to Angels, and to men" (I. Cor. 4:9), who are the audience; the characters are distributed by the almighty God, and there are as many of them as there are states, occupations, and trades in the world. "We are fools for Christ's sake," continues the same Apostle; "but you are wise in Christ we are weak, but you are strong; you are honorable, but we are without honor" (I Cor. 4:10). Rich, poor; sick, healthy; master, servant; prince, peasant; merchant, soldier, tradesman; cleric, layman; married, single; young, old; men, women; parents, children; teacher, scholar; joyful, sorrowful, all these are different characters. Some, indeed, appear to be better off and happier in the part assigned to them, while others are miserable and unhappy; but when the last act is played, and the curtain is dropped at the hour of death, then, as far as worldly dignity is concerned, we are all alike, and our whole claim to praise, honor, and reward lies in the manner in which we have played the parts allotted us by God, that is, the manner in which we have fulfilled the duties and obligations of our state. If I am found wanting in that, although I may have transported mountains by my faith, I have done nothing, and have acted against the will of God.

From this it follows:

1. That the wisdom and goodness of God must be wonderful, since he has made the way to perfection so easy and secure for every one.

2. How little we are to be excused before God if we do not use every effort to become holy and perfect; for

every man, no matter who or what he is, or in what state, can attain perfection simply by doing what he is bound in any case to do daily, provided he does it as well as he can.

3. How much they are mistaken who have high ideas of true Christian holiness and perfection, and imagine that it consists in prayers, holy Communions, outward works of piety, hearing many Masses, and chastising the body. If they do these things, they think they are all right, while they utterly neglect the duties of their state, because they have not the name of being works of devotion. I was good yesterday, they say, and I will be good again today, and perform my devotions. What do you mean? Good? You must be good every day; but what special thing did you do yesterday, and what do you mean to do today? I went to confession and Holy Communion, I heard four Masses one after the other, I gave alms to the poor and went to church in the afternoon, when public devotions were being held; I will do the same today. That is all very good, but it is not enough. The next thing you have to do, and in fact the chief thing that belongs to Christian piety, is to fulfill the duties of your state exactly, to be always satisfied with the arrangements of God's providence, to be patient under crosses and trials. If you forget this latter, I would not give much for your piety. Do this always, and you will always be pious as you should be.

4. How unreasonable the complaints of those who say that they cannot do good on account of their many although necessary occupations, or because they are weak and sickly. Why can you not do good? Oh, I have no time, I have a lot of little children in the house, says a mother, and they keep me going all day. I, says another, have to run about on business. I, says a servant, am kept at it so constantly that I have hardly half an hour on Sundays and holy-days to hear Mass, while on the week days I can with difficulty find a quarter of an hour for my prayers. Ah, says the sick man, I am so weak and suffering! I would willingly go to church and do what others do, but my sickness prevents me; I can hardly manage to say a rosary. Poor people! you do not know what it means to do good! That very work, or business, or weakness that hinders you from prayer and outward works of piety, is according to the will of God, who has ordained that for you in your state of life. You have only to be resigned, and go on with your occupation, or suffer your illness with a good intention for God's sake, and then you will really do good for, if you were to undertake anything else that could not be harmonized with that, you would act against the will of God.

I conclude with the words of our Lord to the young man "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor." Shall I address those words to you too? No, that would not suit people living in the world. But do you wish to be perfect in your state? Then let your chief care be to perform perfectly the daily duties that God has imposed on you, and do not neglect even the least of them. Oh, what consolation for a soul that loves God to think, I am now doing what God wills. I am getting up in the morning, and I am well aware that I cannot do anything more pleasing to God just now. I am hearing holy Mass, doing my work, waiting in my shop, writing and studying, eating and drinking at table, saying my night prayers, going to bed and sleeping, and I am certain that all this is the will of God. What a consolation in the evening to have spent a whole day in that manner! What a comfort at the hour of death to think that I have thus spent my whole life praising and blessing God! What joy and happiness in eternity to see that our worthless, mean, daily actions are the fruitful seed of such unspeakable glory which we shall possess forever in heaven! Should not this encourage us to perform the duties of our state with the greatest perfection and zeal? "He that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Amen.

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