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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

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

The Usefulness of Alms-Giving for Eternal Life.

“Do men gather grapes of thorns?” St. Matthew 7:16.

Literally speaking, no; because thorns are not of such a fruitful nature. Morally speaking, yes. By thorns Christ means worldly riches: “The sower went out to sow his seed; and some fell among thorns; and that which fell among thorns are they who have heard, and, going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit” (St. Luke 8:5, 7, 9). We can gather precious grapes of these thorns, if we plant them in the hands of the poor. But it would not be a reward worth considering for a Christian, if he received mere temporal blessings in return for his charity to the poor. Our thoughts must ascend far higher. Alms must bring us in, along with temporal prosperity, a far greater reward. In heaven we expect to receive the interest of the money that we have given to the poor. There we shall be repaid a hundredfold, as I shall now show, in refutation of the excuses of those who say that they cannot give alms, because they want their money for themselves and their children.

Generous alms-giving increases the treasures of the next life. Therefore, it is foolish not to be generous to the poor, through a desire of saving something in this life for one's self and one's children.

When a man goes to a foreign country, intending to make money there, he does not build a house there nor purchase any immovable property. Because he does not intend to establish himself permanently in that country, but to return home after some time; and therefore his only object is to convert his wares into money, or exchange them for something else that he can easily carry away with him, so as to have something that he and his family may live on in his own country. Still more pleased is he, if he finds any one who will give him a bill of exchange for what money he has. To a person like that he is quite ready to give all his wealth, and to pay a percentage for exchange as well. The bill of exchange is far easier to carry than gold, there is less danger of being robbed of it, and he is just as certain of finding his money on his return home.

O man, place your treasure where your country is. And where is that? Not here, certainly, nor in any place on earth; for we are only strangers and travelers in this life. “For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come” (Hebr. 13:14). Heaven is the fatherland in which we intend to take up our permanent abode with those who belong to us; and it is only for that object that we live here for a short and uncertain time, in a strange country, laboring to gather together as much treasure as we can, that we may send it on to where we can enjoy it

for eternity. “Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth; but lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven” (St. Matthew 6:19, 20). But suppose, oh, avaricious man, that you grow richer by your stinginess, what will you have for eternity, when you begin the journey to your proper country? That which, according to the psalmist, all men find who set their hearts upon riches. “They have slept their sleep, and the men of riches have found nothing in their hands” (Ps. 15:6). You have saved for others, but not for yourself; you have built houses, bought properties, and made money, but in a foreign country, where you have no permanent dwelling, and you have nothing to send before you to your true fatherland.

But, you ask, how can we transfer our possessions to heaven? By a bill of exchange, and we have opportunities of doing so daily and hourly. Where are the merchants who will make the exchange for us? There are enough of them everywhere in the world. The hands of the poor and needy are the holders of bills of exchange, who, if you entrust your money to them, will bring it safely, without fear of loss, and for nothing, too, to your heavenly country. The poor are the merchants who can at once transfer your money to the country to which you properly belong; for they act as agents for their Principal, who is in heaven, and they will give to him, for your benefit, a bill of exchange, which he will pay you a hundredfold when you come to him. And this is the usual wish that poor people express when they receive an alms: “May God reward you hundredfold in heaven!” That wish will at once be acknowledged by the king of heaven, and will be ratified by his own hand, for Christ says: “Sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven” (St. Matthew 19:2). It is Christ who stands at your door ready to receive your aims by the hands of the poor, and to keep them for you; and not to keep them merely, but to multiply them; so that you may have enough for all eternity. “He that hath mercy on the poor, lendeth to the Lord.” Why does God say: “lendeth to the Lord?” Because God knows our avarice, and our desire of always adding to our wealth. He knows, too, that no one lends money unless he is assured that he will suffer no loss thereby. For a creditor requires either a mortgage, or a pledge, or a security, before he lends his money. Now, God sees that the poor can give none of these, and therefore he acts as security for the poor man and as a mortgage or pledge for the creditor. You do not trust in him, God says, on account of his poverty. Trust, then, in me, for I am wealthy; be not afraid; you lend to me. The hand of the poor man is in the treasury of heaven, because whatever he receives our heavenly Father takes possession of. And where does he place it? In heaven; and lest, perchance, you might fear that you will make no profit, you will receive a hundredfold all that you have sent on to heaven by the hands of the poor. See what interest you will receive: give to God, in the person of his poor, something of your temporal wealth, and you will receive eternal riches. Give him a little of this earth, and he will give you the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you give to the poor will be yours, and will remain yours a hundredfold.

I again appeal to the judgment-seat of God, before which we must all appear. For what other reason will Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, bestow on the just the kingdom of heaven, if not on account of their alms-deeds and other works of mercy? And why will he condemn the wicked to hell, if not because they are wanting in these works? He will say: “Come, ye blessed of my Father,” enter into the kingdom that is prepared for you. And why prepared for you? I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked, a stranger, and sick, and you have given me to eat and drink; you have clothed me and visited me when I was sick and in prison, and therefore the eternal treasures of my heavenly kingdom are prepared for you. But you, ye wicked, have not done those things; therefore, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!” (St. Matthew 25:34, 35). For it was I whom you so unmercifully turned away from your door, when I asked you in vain for a piece of bread; it was I whom you sent away empty-handed and with harsh words; it was I who privately suffered hunger and want at home; you knew of it, and did not help me. “Away with you, accursed,” into everlasting fire? And when could that have been the case? Perhaps when Christ was on earth with his poor foster-father and his poor Mother in the cottage at Nazareth. Oh, no; for then but very few would have been able to purchase heaven by such works of mercy! If that were the case the majority of people would have reason to make excuses. Lord, when have we seen thee hungry, thirsty, naked, poor, sick, and in prison? We have never had the happiness of seeing thee. Certainly, you have that happiness every day, as often as you see a poor person: “As often as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me” (St. Matthew 25:40).

Oh, how the sinner will then gnash his teeth with rage? How the avaricious man will rave and curse the greed of gold that prevented him from helping the poor, when he sees the just going to heaven, and that, too, because they acted differently from him with regard to alms-giving! Imagine that a splendid property is offered for sale;

a miser would willingly buy it, but refuses to do so because he cannot knock a few cents off the price; another man comes up, pays the price required, and recovers all his outlay in the first year from his newly acquired property. How the miser would grieve, then, because he lost such a splendid chance for the sake of a few cents? And so, too, as David tells us, will the avaricious and miserly grieve when they see the glory and happiness of those who were generous in giving alms, as described in the words: "He hath distributed, he hath given to the poor; his justice remaineth forever and ever; his horn shall be exalted in glory;" while the wicked man, "shall gnash with his teeth and pine away" (Ps. 111:9), for he shall see and shall be angry. With a little money, he will think, which they have given to the poor, those others have acquired the eternal treasures of heaven! Could I not have made the same purchase as cheaply? The kingdom of heaven was also offered to me for sale! Oh, fool that I was? I wished to save a few cents or a piece of bread, and now I have lost all? "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Such are the words with which Christ concludes the parable of the rich man who said to his soul: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer," but who had to hear the words: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee, and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (St. Luke 12:20, 21).

And now I come to the customary excuse of avaricious Christians: how can I give alms generously? What will become of my children, and what shall I leave to my heirs? Oh, man of little faith! You ask what will become of your children? Do not forget that generosity toward the poor is the surest way to gain riches for yourself and your children, even in this life, and that it is the best legacy you can leave your heirs and descendants; nay, that niggardliness toward the poor is the surest road to want and poverty. But I speak now only of heavenly treasures. Supposing, then, that you and your family suffer loss through alms-giving, and that it even brought you to want, which would be contrary to the divine promises; is not your soul of more value in your eyes than your bodily ease and comfort? Are you not of more importance to yourself than to your children? Do you not think more of eternal life than of the short and uncertain time that you must spend in this vale of tears? Ah, God help you! you make no difficulty of spending a large sum of money in building a house here on earth, or in buying a piece of land, and you will not give away a trifle to build a mansion in heaven, where you should live for eternity with your children; you will not part with a small sum to purchase your own country in heaven! How many prisoners are there not who say to the judge: Take everything I have, only let me live a little longer! But you do not think: Let Jesus Christ take the tenth, the fourth part, the half of my goods by the hands of the poor, if I can only live forever! You are ready to give away even the necessities of life, even your last piece of bread, and to beg for the rest of your days if that were required to save your life; but you will not give even of your abundance to Christ, that you may reign with him forever! "Have pity on your soul!"

What will be left for my children? Are you, then, so anxious to leave your children and descendants something in this strange land, that you are ready to appear empty-handed in the land of the elect, and to be banished from it bare and naked? That would be to disinherit yourself, so as to be able to leave something to others. That would be to hate, persecute, nay, murder yourself. If your children get married you give them a part of your wealth, but you are too prudent to give them the whole of it; you keep the better and greater part of it for yourself, so that you may be able to live decently in your old age. And are you so improvident with regard to eternity that you keep nothing for yourself to live on? And what sort are the people you are so anxious about here below? The words of God are still true: "He storeth up, and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things." For my children, you answer. Do you know what they will do with your money? Perhaps they will squander in a short time what you scraped together with a great deal of trouble, nay, they may even use it to offend God. Perhaps they will never be in the least grateful to you for it; perhaps, when you are buried, they will forget you, and not even say an Our Father for your soul. You save up your money for children who will turn out you know not how, and for people who must soon die and follow you into eternity, where you and they will perhaps be separated forever. Provide for yourself, then, first of all! "Have pity on your soul!" You should, at least, treat your soul as well as your children, and not deprive it of what belongs to it. What you are now storing up is for all your children, is it not? But your own soul should be the most beloved child of all; give it, therefore, the best part; make over your property to your true fatherland, by the hands of the poor.

When the Israelites wished to make a golden calf to worship it as their god, Aaron, thinking thereby to dissuade them from their wicked purpose, asked them for all their gold and silver ornaments. The people

unhesitatingly did as he requested them, and joyfully brought him their treasures. If he had asked as much from them to build an altar to the true God, or to help the poor, he would hardly have received a single earring. Such is the case, too, among Christians nowadays. If a false idol is to be honored, if a sacrifice is demanded by pride, sensuality, love of comfort and the vain usages of the world, or by vanity and foppery, there is money enough. But come here, you poor brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, stretch out your hands, cry out your wants, beg in the name of God, and promise a hundredfold reward in the kingdom of heaven. Oh, there is nothing for you, nothing for Christ! People want all they have; they have too many children and a small income; God help you! Christians, where is our faith? What are we doing to gain heaven?

My design is to exhort and encourage you to be more and more generous to the poor. Lay up a treasure, then, in heaven as well as you can, by the hands of the poor. Listen to what St. Augustine says: “God,” when he asks you to give alms, “does not require you to deprive yourself of your wealth, but merely to transfer it to another place.” If a friend of yours came to your house and saw that you had stored up all your corn in a damp place, he would say to you: What have you done? You will lose all your corn, after having had so much labor and trouble with it. You have put it in a damp place, and in a few days it must rot away. Put it higher up, in a dry place. And you would follow your friend’s advice and store up your corn better. Do you, then, refuse to hear Christ, when he tells you to lift up your treasure from earth to heaven, where it can remain with you forever? Amen.

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