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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

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

The Efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance.

"*To dig I am not able, to beg 1 am ashamed. I know what to do.*" St. Luke 16:3, 4.

The unjust steward of the Gospel represents the sinner who by mortal sin is guilty of unfaithfulness to God, and squanders all the precious treasures of his soul, so that he is reduced to the extremity of spiritual poverty, and can neither dig nor beg; that is, he cannot do anything meritorious of eternal life, either by his prayers and good works, or by the trials and crosses entailed by his sins. "What shall I do," asks the sinner, "in order to make good the losses I have sustained?" Go, like the steward of the parable, and call together your Master's debtors; that is, recall to mind all the sins you have committed, acknowledge them penitently in the sacred tribunal, and thus you will learn by your own experience that in the Sacrament of Penance,

I. The sinner makes good a1l that he had lost by sin; and

II. That in the Sacrament of Penance, he becomes spiritually richer than ever he was in the state of innocence.

I. We should not deplore too much the loss of a thing that cannot be recovered or replaced. Such sorrow is unavailing and useless. For instance, why should I give way to immoderate grief on account of the death of a dear friend? Can I bring back the departed, even if I wept tears of blood? In such a case, prudence dictates that I should submit humbly to the decrees of Providence. In the same way, one might say to me, what is the use of my being sorry for my sins? Will all my contrition undo the evil? There they are, and there they must remain. True; if I were to weep the ocean full of tears, I could not get rid of the fact that I have sinned. For all eternity, it must remain true that I have despised my Sovereign God, and grievously offended him. For all eternity, Adam must acknowledge that he has transgressed the divine command, and brought misery on all his descendants; for all eternity, Peter must acknowledge that he denied his Master most disgracefully three times; and Magdalene must confess that she was the greatest sinner of the place in which she lived. Yes, in so far, neither sorrow, nor resolution, nor confession, nor penance is of any good. But it is one thing to make a sin as if it never had been committed, and another, to make good the loss and damage caused by it. A woman cannot recall her deceased son or husband to life by weeping for him; but if thereby she is enabled to bear her sorrow and desolation better, or to make good the loss she has suffered, then, indeed, she would have every right to weep as much as she likes.

And that is what the sinner can affect by confessing his sins with proper sorrow. Thereby, he can recover what he has lost and that as completely and quickly as if he had never sinned. Ah sinners, think of what a fearful loss you suffer, in that unhappy moment when you commit a mortal sin, even if it is only in thought; and then you will have some idea of the great benefit to be derived from the Sacrament of Penance! You have lost, as far as in you lie, for all eternity, the supreme and infinite Good, God himself, and his favor and friendship, the life

of your immortal soul, all the infused supernatural virtues and ornaments of your soul. You have lost, and for all eternity, the merits you had heaped up during your life by your good works and by the trials you have endured; you have lost, and for all eternity, all right to the heavenly joys that were prepared for you ; you have lost, and for all eternity, the rest, repose, and peace of your conscience. From all this evil you can be freed, and can completely recover all you have lost, the very moment you make a good confession and receive sacramental absolution from the priest who sits in the sacred tribunal in the place of God.

1. First of all, God becomes again your loving friend. While you were in the unhappy state of sin, he not merely refused to recognize you, but even pursued you with the bitterest hatred, and looked on you with disgust. He loves you now as much, and is as favorable to you, as if you had preserved your baptismal innocence and had never done anything to offend Him. "He will turn again," says the Lord, "and have mercy on us: He will put away our iniquities, and He will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea" (Mich. 7:19). A stone that is thrown into the depths of the sea is never seen again, so, when sins, no matter how grievous they are, are once washed away in the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, they are buried and sunk forever out of the sight of God, as if they had never been committed Nay, as a proof of His having completely forgiven them, God will not allow them to remain any longer in His memory: "For, if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed . . . living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done" (Ezech. 8:21, 22). But how can that be? Can the Almighty forget what He once has known, or can His knowledge be changed? There is one kind of forgetfulness, by which one is unable to recall what he knew before, and this cannot be in God, who of necessity must know all things from eternity to eternity by an unchangeable knowledge. There is another kind of forgetfulness by which one gives no outward sign of what he knows, and acts as if it were altogether unknown to him; and it is in this sense, that God is said to forget the sins of those who truly repent. As far as their guilt is concerned, they are no longer remembered against the sinner; God shows him as much love and favor as if he had never been guilty of the least transgression; and if he who has been forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance should be so ungrateful as to fall again into the same mortal sins, those that he has got rid of by a good confession would never be held up against him, as far as their guilt is concerned; nay, if he is lost forever on account of the new sins he has committed, the former ones, for which he obtained forgiveness, would not be taken account of in his punishment. They are forgotten, and will remain so forever. And therefore, the sinner is just as high in the favor and friendship of God, as if he had never committed a single mortal sin. What a consolation for me, and for all those who have sinned grievously!

2. In the second place, you were bearing about in your body, while in the state of sin, a soul that was disgusting and abominable in the sight of God, according to his words, "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die" (Ezech. 18:4). The beautiful life of sanctifying grace, is given back to you when you have received absolution in the Sacrament of Penance; and you are again clothed with the precious garment, which compels God to love you, and which, if you die invested with it, secures the entrance of your soul into heaven, We have a figure of this in the Prodigal Son. When he returned to his father, full of repentance, and acknowledged his fault, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," the father cried out at once, full of joy, "Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet… let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead, and is come to life again; was lost and is found" (St. Luke 15:21,24). By the ring on the hand and the shoes on the feet, we are to understand the other ornaments of the soul, that is, the different supernatural virtues that were infused in Baptism, which follow and wait, like courtiers, on sanctifying grace as on their queen. These, too, are all restored to the repentant soul in the Sacrament of Penance.

3. You must know, that all the merits of the good works you performed while in the state of grace are completely lost the moment you commit one mortal sin; and while you are in the state of sin, they are of no more use to you than a defaced coin that has lost its value. So that, if you were to die in that unhappy state, you would not receive the least reward for all your good works, even if you had surpassed in holiness the Blessed Virgin herself. In the Sacrament of Penance, you can make good all those immense losses, and restore your former good works and merits to life again. After a valid confession, you are just as rich in merits as you were before you committed a single mortal sin, and those merits will all be set down to your credit and to your eternal glory. This is in accordance with the general teaching of theologians, and is partly founded on the promise made by God to the prophet Joel. After the Lord had said: "Be converted to me with all your heart" (Joel 2:12), he

adds: “And I will restore to you the years of which the locust and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmer-worm hath eaten” (Ibid. 25) that is, I will restore to those who do penance all the fruits they collected while in the state of grace before they sinned.

4. The Sacrament of Penance brings back to us our lost peace of mind and repose of conscience. Certain and infallible is the truth that the Holy Ghost has spoken: “A wicked heart shall be laden with sorrows” (Ecclus. 3:29). Nor can it be otherwise. An honest man who has got into debt and is pressed by his creditors on all sides, but has not the means of paying them, must be necessarily troubled by many painful and uneasy thoughts. Hardly does he dare to venture out into the street, lest he should meet one of his creditors. With good reason was it once said of a man who was deeply in debt: “I should like to see the pillow on which that man can sleep at night!” Meaning thereby, that it was impossible for such a one to enjoy his night’s rest. But if some good fortune falls to his lot, if, for instance, he inherits a large sum that enables him to pay all his debts; what profound peace of heart he at once enjoys! What must be the thoughts of a malefactor in prison waiting for sentence of death to be passed on him? His thoughts by day, and, if be can sleep at all, his dreams by night, are all employed upon the tortures of a disgraceful death. If he hears the bolt undrawn on the door of his prison, a cold sweat breaks out all over him. Now (he thinks), they are coming to bring me to the gallows.

Sinner, before your good confession you were a debtor to the almighty God, who had you completely in his power. You owed him as many millions as you had committed sins; for when you pray to the Lord, you say, “Forgive us our trespasses,” or our debts. Nor had you a farthing in your possession to pay them. Your bad conscience was the importunate creditor, constantly crying in your ear, “Pay what thou owest!” How have you been able to find any rest while in such a state? You were suffering from an internal abscess, the pain of which must have taken away all pleasure from you, unless you were quite hardened.

Now, what is he to do who is in this miserable state, in order to regain the wished-for peace and repose? David, who had experience of it, tells us how he acted in his trouble and anguish! “I said, I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord” (Ps. 31:5). It is by the confession of our sins that we receive the writing sealed with the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to prove that we have had all our debts remitted by the Almighty forever. By confession, we get rid of the foul sore of sin. By confession, our chains are broken; we are liberated from the slavery of the devil, and restored to the freedom of the beloved children of God. Hence, as a matter of course, when the cause of our fear, anxiety, and trouble has been removed, our minds must enjoy a great peace and contentment. I call as witnesses to the truth of this all those who have been great sinners, and who have freed themselves from their sins by a good confession. How did you feel when you came out of the confessional, and had performed the penance imposed on you? Must you not acknowledge, that it seemed as if a heavy mill-stone had been removed from your necks; and as if the heavens looked brighter than before? You went to sleep with hearts filled with joy and peace, and you got up in the morning with the sweet assurance that you were among the friends and children of God. It is evident, then, that true repose and happiness are only to be found in a good conscience. Sinners, try it but once, and learn what a happy and salutary thing it is to be freed from the burden of sin! Come, repent of and confess your sins, and it will be with you as with the Hebrews when they were freed from the slavery of Egypt: “He brought them out with silver and gold” (Ps. 104:37). Silver and gold taken from the Egyptians by the command of God; so that they went away richer than when they came. So also, I repeat, not only does the sinner get back all he had lost in the Sacrament of Penance, but he becomes spiritually richer than he ever was before.

II. Are we, then, to sin boldly in order to become richer in graces and merits after confession? By no means; that does not at all follow from what I have said. Sin brings with it neither grace nor merit. It is the canker-worm that gnaws away and kills all our merits. Nay, what is still worse, it renders valueless all the good works we perform in the state of sin. It is one thing to become richer by penance than one was before having sinned, and another to become richer than one would have been if he had never sinned. Therefore I say, by way of warning, to each and every one, “Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God” (Jerem. 2:9). Yet I say also, to the greater glory of the divine mercy and by way of encouragement to repenting sinners, that by penance and confession the sincere soul may regain all that it has lost and add a new gain to its former merits. How can this be done?

1. Along with the graces he had before, the true penitent receives by the efficacy of the Sacrament, through the merits of Jesus Christ, a new degree of sanctifying grace which he never had before, and which strengthens

him against future temptations, and prevents him from falling again into sin. You see, therefore, that he has already gained by the Sacrament of Penance something he never had before. But perhaps you will think that is not much. Oh, I answer, in the words of our dear Lord to the Samaritan woman, "If thou didst know the gift of God" (St. John 4:10). Sanctifying grace is such a great and precious treasure, that the least degree of it is far more valuable than all the riches of the earth, because they are but natural, whilst sanctifying grace is supernatural, and is a participation of the divine nature.

2. The second advantage to be derived from the Sacrament of Penance is, that the sinner who has been guilty of grievous transgressions, when he has once been converted, and has repented of and confessed his sins, is, generally speaking, more on his guard in future and is more humble and earnest in the divine service, than he was before, and has a greater love of God than when he was innocent. This is what our Lord meant by those words: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance" (St. Luke 15:7). Has God then more pleasure in a penitent soul than in an innocent one? than in ninety-nine just souls that have never offended him? The state of innocence is in itself a more perfect and happy state, and is more pleasing to God ; yet the penitent sinner is in so far more pleasing to God, because, generally speaking, penitents become more cautious, humble, and fervent. Never did Magdalene love Christ more tenderly, than when she repented of and confessed her manifold sins. Never was Peter more humble and fervent in procuring the glory of his divine master, than after he had denied him, and bewailed his denial with bitter tears.

3. As a consequence of this, since God loves more tenderly those who are more inflamed with love for him, it is generally the case that, as the repentant sinner becomes more humble and zealous in the divine service, so he also receives more graces, favors, and benefits from God, than many others who never offended him grievously and do not serve him with so much zeal. The parable of the Prodigal furnishes us with a figure of this. On the return of his undutiful son, the father prepared a splendid banquet to welcome him, a thing he had never done for his elder son, who having always been obedient to him, complained bitterly of the seeming injustice : "Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son is come, who bath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf" (St. Luke 1:29, 30). Magdalene, formerly a public sinner, was the first among the holy women; Peter, who had denied his Master three times, was the first among the Apostles to be honored by a visit from the Risen Lord; Paul became a great and wonderful saint, after having persecuted the Church.

What a good and merciful God we have to deal with! If a criminal who is already under the gallows thinks it the greatest happiness to hear that his life is spared, how would he not exult with joy if he learned, moreover, that he was to be raised to a throne? But a far greater happiness is given to us by the Sacrament of Penance; for not only are our lives spared, that we had forfeited eternally; not only do we get back all we had lost but, besides, we become, by sanctifying grace, children of God, and heirs to an eternal kingdom; nay, we are higher in the favor of our Lord than we were before. Is it possible, then, that there can be sinners who are afraid of confession? Who can prefer to wallow like a beast in the filth of sin, rather than sit on a throne of honor for all eternity? To die an unhappy death and go to hell, rather than gain endless treasures and riches by such an easy and efficacious means? How long will you, then, continue to rob your God of the joy he would have in your conversion, and yourselves of such a great good? "For Christ we beseech you," I say to you in the words of St. Paul, "be reconciled to God" (2Cor. 5:20). Delay no longer, but taste at once and see how sweet and merciful the Lord is to his friends.

And you, converted sinners, who have already, by a good confession, laid aside the heavy burden of your sins, but are sometimes oppressed and filled with anxiety at the recollection of your former crimes; be consoled, be of good courage and rejoice in the Lord! "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him," such is the assurance the good God himself gives you, "in what day so ever he shall turn from his wickedness" (Ezech. 33:12). No; you are now beloved and prized by God, and, if you wish, you may be even more loved and prized than if you had never sinned. Let us all, then, come to this conclusion: to serve henceforth the good God, who, as we must acknowledge, has been so merciful to us, with more care, humility and zeal, and to love him above all things, constantly, perseveringly. Amen.

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