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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

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Decent Poor

*"To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed."* St. Luke 16:3.

Well may the steward ask: What shall I do? To lose one's employment, to have nothing to live upon, to be unable to work for one's living, and to be ashamed to beg for it, these, indeed, are circumstances which might easily make one despair. I feel sick at heart when I think of the miserable condition of the decent poor, who are reduced to poverty by misfortune, who cannot work on account of old age, weakness, or sickness, or because they do not know how, and who are unable to continue their business through want of means, while they are ashamed to ask for alms, or to beg their bread, and must cry out with the steward in the Gospel: "What shall I do?" Yet people do not often think of them, because their poverty is little known. Pity for these poor people has induced me to speak in their behalf today.

*We must especially help the decent poor, according to our means, whenever we can, in preference to all others.*

He who, without suffering any great loss thereby, can help his neighbor who is in grievous want, and who cannot help himself, is bound to do so by the law of God, the law of charity, and the law of nature; and if he refuses to give the necessary help, he commits a sin of cruelty that is condemned by all laws, human and divine. The law of God tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves (St. Matthew 19:19); right reason tells us to do to each one as we should wish him to do to us in the same circumstances, and therefore we must not allow another to suffer a misfortune from which we can free him. For instance, a man falls into the water; although he is an utter stranger to you, you seize hold of him at once to save him from drowning. A child falls down into the mud, and commences to cry; you at once help it to get up, although it be the child of a Turk or a heathen. If you acted otherwise you would show great cruelty and hard-heartedness. The priest and the Levite who passed by the poor man who was wounded by the robbers, were they not as cruel as the robbers themselves? Nay, you are even inclined to pity a dog that is in pain, and to give it relief. So says our Lord also to the Pharisees: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him out on the Sabbath day?" (St. Luke 14:5.)

Who are they whose cause I am advocating today? Are they dogs, or asses, or oxen? Are they heathens or Turks, strangers or foreigners? If they were even dumb animals they would have a right to expect a merciful

heart and a helpful hand to assist them in the misery in which they cannot help themselves. But they live in the same country, the same town, and profess the same Christian religion that we do; they have been unfortunate; they are reduced to poverty; but they are redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, as well as we. They are poor, but they have the same Father in heaven that we have. They are poor, but they hope to have the same inheritance as we hope for from their heavenly Father. They are poor, but they are not on that account of less value than we; perhaps much better and more precious in the sight of God. Now, these people, who are so closely connected with us in many ways, are in want; they are in grievous want, and who can deny it? For, is it not grievous want to be obliged to depend on the mercy of others for the necessities of life, to have hardly bread enough to eat, to be forced to stretch out the hand to implore help from others, and to beg for alms for God's sake? They who are born in poverty can easily endure it, for they are reared in it also; they have received no inheritance from their parents except the beggar's staff, and they only know how to beg, and nothing more. If one of these gets a piece of bread and meat from a charitable person, he enjoys it as much as a rich man would a sumptuous repast, and he is surprised at his good fortune; but if you were to ask him to work and earn his bread, he would probably refuse, for he would prefer to idle about the streets and beg from door to door, as is generally the case with street loiterers. Therefore, I repeat, such people can easily help themselves. But for a man who has been accustomed to better things, who has been brought up respectably, and has hitherto earned his bread by his business, to be reduced to poverty and distress, through a decree of Providence, by some unforeseen calamity, by a bad season, or by hard times, that is, indeed, a hard, a bitter trial, such as no public beggar has to bear. There is no doubt that it is a sadder sight to behold Job, who was formerly so rich, reduced to extreme poverty, abandoned by all, and seated on a dunghill; or to see Tobias robbed of his wealth by Sennacherib, and reduced to great want; or Ruth, born of respectable parents, obliged to sustain herself by gleaning corn in the fields; it is a sadder sight, I say, to behold such things than to see Lazarus, who was always poor, suffering hunger at the rich man's door. Those who are called the decent poor in our days are in the same sad condition; they have not been born in poverty, but have fallen into it through misfortune; they are as much in want as beggars, but they are not used to it, nor can they make their wants publicly known. Sometimes they suffer more from hunger than beggars do, and, what is worse still, they shrink from telling others of it, and cannot bear to beg for bread, which other poor people do without the least difficulty; or else they venture out furtively to ask for alms, like Nicodemus, who came to see Christ at night, through fear of the Jews, or they make known their misery only to some trusty friend or neighbor. Nay, when something is privately offered to them, they cannot take it without feeling shame and grief. Public beggars shout out their wants in the streets; they exaggerate them sometimes, and thus excite people to greater compassion for them; the decent poor, on the contrary, labor and suffer in secret with their children, and receive less help, as their wants are not so well known to others. Certainly, their poverty is greater than any other in the world!

Oh, you who are able to help them, surely, if you have human hearts in your bosoms, now is the time for you to prove it! St. John says: "He that hath the substance of this world, and shall see his brother in need, and shall shut up his bowels from him: how doth the charity of God abide in him?" (St. John 3:17) How is it possible for such a man to say that he loves God? If it is a sin of hard-heartedness to send away empty-handed one who is not ashamed to beg, how much greater sin is it not to refuse help to those who, through shame, can do nothing for themselves!

The decent poor suffer from the extravagance of the rich, for, while some are thus satisfied with their position, because their families are well provided for, their employments are lucrative, and they can live comfortably, there are many who are in the greatest poverty, who have large families and heavy debts, and who would cry out with the sick man who sat at the pond of Bethsaida, "I have no man" (St. John 5:7); I have been unfortunate, and have nothing left; no one will look at me now. Now, I know the meaning of the saying: "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Formerly I was able to earn my bread, but now that I am sick there is no one to take pity on me or help me; no one to visit or console me! While some have everything they require, and are quite content with themselves, there are many unfortunate people who might say with the Prodigal Son: "How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger!" (St. Luke 15:17) Even the wicked are able to spend money on unnecessary things, while I must pine away through want! They indulge their extravagance in dress; they have many articles of clothing that they will never use again, but I have hardly a rag to cover myself! The worms can eat the corn in their granaries, but I have not bread to eat!

They have money in their coffers, but I have not a penny! They have costly dishes in abundance, until they turn away from them through sheer disgust, but I can hardly get the plainest food for myself and my children. Even their horses and dogs get enough to eat, but I must eat bread that many a well-fed dog would refuse to touch.

Is it not a shame (if such is the case, and that is what I do not and cannot know) for a Christian to spend his money on a thousand vanities, when he knows well that many of his brethren and sisters have hardly anything to eat and he unfeelingly refuses to help them? How the complaints of the poor, who cry to God for vengeance against those hard-hearted people, who think only of themselves, must re-echo through the clouds! "He that stoppeth his ear against the cry of the poor, shall also cry himself, and shall not be heard" (Prov. 21:13). What will such people answer on the Day of Judgment, when Christ will say to them in an angry voice: "I was hungry and you gave me not to eat"? (St. Matthew 25:42) Their doom is sealed: "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy" (James 2:13).

But what will become of those who not only refuse to assist the decent poor, but who are ashamed of them, and turn away their eyes and hearts from them, and do not acknowledge them, simply because they are in poverty and trouble? And, alas! It is only too often the case, nowadays, that such poor men, instead of being treated with Christian charity, are only laughed at and ridiculed. "As humility is an abomination to the proud, so also the rich man abhorreth the poor" (Eccles. 13:14). What will become of those who entrap the decent poor by all sorts of legal chicanery; who allow them to be defrauded, or neglect their just claims, because they are weak and powerless, or weary them by unnecessary delays in matters of justice; who try to make their profit out of the general misfortune in times of scarcity; who raise the price of provisions, so that many are compelled to sell their little property at a loss in order to buy food, thus verifying the words of our Lord: "He that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath" (St. Matthew 13:12). "Fear and tremble, all you who thus take advantage of the poor!" For although you have power, money, and influence, yet the poor have much mightier weapons with which to defend themselves, namely, their prayers and cries for help. Nor will God forget them: "For, requiring their blood, he hath remembered them; he hath not forgotten the cry of the poor" (Ps. 9:10). If he, says St. Augustine, is condemned to hell to whom Christ will say: I was naked, and thou hast not clothed me, what place in hell will be kept for him to whom Christ will say: I was clothed and you stripped me? They who have not clothed the naked shall burn with the devil. But where shall they burn who have plundered widows and orphans? Oh, what will then be the fate of those wicked husbands who bring their wives and children to poverty by their intemperance, and who make away with not merely the daily earnings, but even the clothes of their wives and children, to spend the proceeds in the saloon? Such poor wives and children are all the more to be pitied, since they find so few who will believe and help them, for they are generally treated as impostors when they ask for assistance. Your husband is young and strong, people say to the poor wife; he can support you well enough if he likes. But they never think that it is the young, strong man who has reduced her to want. Alas! We can again say with St. Augustine: "If they who have not clothed the naked shall burn with the devil, where shall they burn" who plunder their own wives and children, and reduce them to beggary?

Christians, let us prove that we are children of the Father of mercy and true followers of Jesus Christ, who had such compassion for the poor! We should make friends of the decent poor especially. But where are we to find those poor people? Ah, that is a question worth asking! Though they are ashamed to appear in public, yet they are known here and there in your neighborhood. "Want goeth before his face" (Job 4:13). You can see their poverty in their sunken eyes and pallid faces. And if you really wish to help them you can find ways enough of doing so, either by yourselves or by means of others. "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor" (Ps. 40:2). Why does David say "that understandeth?" Why does he not say: Who give to the poor? That we may give also to those who do not ask, through shame. That is not true charity that is forced from us by continued asking. Give alms just as God gives them to you every day. The rain falls upon your fields before even you pray for it. The sun rises while you are still in bed. The tree bears fruit for you while you are asleep. Your vineyards produce wine. All the elements help to support you, although you do not think of them. "Blessed is he that understandeth" in the same way how to give alms to the poor, and to help them, although they do not ask him for help. By giving alms in that way, since such poor people do not appear publicly before your door, like ordinary beggars, you will better fulfill the counsel of Jesus Christ: "That thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee" (St. Matthew 6:4) a hundredfold here, and the kingdom of heaven hereafter.

Finally, I address you, poor Christians, whoever you may be, who daily think and say in your secret poverty, with the steward: “To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed.” “What shall I do?” I have nothing before me, no help, no resource. Must I despair? God forbid! Must I give vent to my impatience and murmur against heaven? Certainly not. What good would that do? Shall I try to help myself by unlawful means? No, that would be a great mistake. “What shall I do?” Shall I call upon God to punish the hard-hearted and wealthy? Shall I curse and revile them? By no means; that would only make matters worse: that would change your temporal misery, by which you can gain heaven, into an eternal hell, where you would be wretched forever. I know what I shall do. “Make friends for yourselves.” If no one in the world will help you, or be your friend, if all men abandon you, make friends for yourselves in heaven by bearing your poverty patiently. Select and keep as your Friend the good God, to whom the prophet says: “To thee is the poor man left; thou wilt be a helper to the orphan” (Ps. 9:14). Make known your misery to him; place your whole hope in him who provides for the ravens and the smallest worm. “Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will sustain you” (Ps. 54:23). “I have been young, and am now old; and I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread” (Ps. 36:25). Have you offended God by sin? If so, your condition is wretched indeed! But you must say with the penitent Prodigal: I know what I will do: I will arise, and by sincere repentance be converted to my heavenly Father (St. Luke 15:18). Are you, as I hope, in the state of grace? Then, for your consolation, remember him who, “being rich, became poor for your sakes” (2 Cor. 8:9), your Saviour Jesus Christ, who bore poverty for thirty-three years, and had not whereon to lay his head. Think every day of what Tobias said to his son: “We lead, indeed, a poor life, but we shall have many good things if we fear God and depart from all sin, and do that which is good” (Tob. 4:23). To you, poor people, I say the same words: Dear children of God, be not troubled nor afraid! It is true that you lead a poor life, but what great riches and treasures you can collect if you fear God and avoid sin! What riches? All the riches imaginable. Look up to heaven and number the stars, if you can; all that, with God himself, will be your portion forever! You say, we shall have it all hereafter, but now we are in suffering and sorrow. And what does that matter? You shall have it in a very short time. Christ said to his Apostles: “In a little while you shall see me” (St. John 6:16), and possess all goods with me. If, then, you have God as your Friend, what more do you want? What has the rich man, if he has not God: and what does the poor man want who has God? Amen.

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