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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 + + +

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The Good Intention in our Daily Actions

“Seeing the city, he wept over it.” St. Luke 19:41.

It must indeed have been a weighty matter that could draw tears from the eyes of Jesus. He foresaw not only the temporal destruction of the great city of Jerusalem, but the eternal ruin of the Jewish people. We, too, have reason to weep when we consider the manner of life that most Christians lead nowadays; nor am I now alluding merely to those who are in the state of sin, losing the precious time of grace and every day going nearer and nearer to hell, but also to those who are not given to great vices, and who, being in the state of grace, do what God wills them to do, and yet derive no fruit for their souls, although they have such splendid opportunities of acquiring immense and lasting riches, because they neglect the good intention in their daily actions. Hence,

Deplorable is the state of those who forget the good intention in their daily actions, for they thus cause the greatest loss to their souls.

If the good intention is not commanded under the pain of sin, yet it is but right to show that honor to God, for at least it does one no harm. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all to the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31). Mark the words “Whatsoever else you do,” they admit of no exception. From this we must conclude that God wishes to be honored in everything we do the whole day long; but that we cannot do unless we direct our works to him by the good intention. It is but right and proper to direct all our actions to the honor and glory of God; for on the one hand God has every title to expect this from us, while on the other, it is a practice of the greatest utility to us, and when it is neglected we willfully inflict great loss on our souls. I will confine myself to this last point. Tell me, O man, you who have different duties to perform every day in your state or occupation; your head is full of many cares and anxieties, and your body wearied with many labors and difficulties; will not that be the case with you whether you make the good intention or not? If you pay that honor to God, if you raise your mind to him and offer him all you do, will your care and trouble be greater on that account? No, indeed; they will rather be considerably lessened. Will man derive less advantage from your actions? Will the good intention bring less profit to your household? Will it cause you to suffer loss in your temporal affairs? But will not your wares be just as valuable as before? Will not your master pay you just the same wages? Will not your services be repaid by the same food and salary? Can you not study or write as well as before? Certainly, and a great deal better. For, in recompense of the honor paid him, the good God will give you more help and grace. Will the good intention, perhaps, deprive your soul of some spiritual advantage? Will it render you less able to keep the commandments, or to conquer temptations to sin? Will you have less merit and reward in eternity to expect on account of it? Quite the contrary; you will not suffer the least loss; the whole work, its merit and its reward, is and remains yours; nay, the merit and reward come from the good intention alone.

Not only do we lose nothing thereby, but on the other hand we rather inflict an irreparable injury on our souls when we neglect it. And in the first place, most of the acts we do in the day are neither good nor bad considered in themselves, neither praise-worthy nor culpable; such, for example, as walking, standing, sitting, seeing, hearing, speaking, eating, drinking, sleeping, playing, studying, reading, writing, buying, selling, suffering annoyances or trouble, and so forth. If all these things are done with a bad intention, they are all wicked and sinful; but no matter how trifling they are, if the good intention is not wanting, they become of such value that not all the riches of earth would be able to purchase them. Water, although its natural inclination is to run downwards, can be driven upwards by artificial means, as we see in fountains, in which the water is made to reach almost the height of the mountain from which it originally comes. In the same manner the most lowly duties we perform, the very meanest things we do, which in themselves savor only of the earth, can be so exalted by a supernatural end that they ascend to the highest heavens, and reach God himself, whom they merit as their eternal reward. Even the most lowly actions can be made valuable by the good intention. What more trivial act can there be than to give a cup of cold water to a thirsty man? And yet, if that is done with a good motive, hear what Christ himself says of it: "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple: amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (St. Matthew 10:42). What more common, nay, more carnal and animal-like, than to satisfy the stomach by eating and drinking? Yet if, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, that is done for the honor and glory of God, in order to preserve health for his service, it merits eternal joy in heaven.

By neglecting the good intention you deprive yourself of the eternal goods and merits of your soul, which you had almost in your hand, and which ought to be the reward of the good works you perform, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, visiting the sick, burying the dead, and so on. If you do those things sometimes through habit, you imagine that you have done wonders; but if the good intention has been wanting, even holy works of that kind have not the least merit for eternity for your soul, and they all lose their holiness and worth when they are not performed with a supernatural motive. For, as St. Bernard says, "everything you do is vanity, save and except what you do for God and in honor of God." Even to go to church and pray is no help to salvation, if the good intention is wanting. The Pharisee stood in the temple before the altar and prayed fervently: "O God, I give thee thanks. I fast twice in a week: I give tithes of all that I possess" (St. Luke 18:11, 12); and yet his prayer, as well as his rich alms, was rejected by the Lord as worthless, because he had not the right intention. "Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded?" Such is the complaint the Israelites addressed to God: "Why have we humbled our souls, and thou hast not taken notice?" But the Lord answered them by the prophet Isaias, saying: "Behold, in the day of your fast your own will is found" (Is. 58:3). You fast and humble yourselves because it pleases you to do so, and not out of a pure intention of pleasing me. See, says St. Augustine, after citing many examples of that kind, see how God looks not to what man does, but to the motive for which he does it. We can sin and deserve eternal punishment if we do willfully what we know to be forbidden under grievous sin, although we may not have a bad intention; but do good and merit heaven we cannot, although the work may be good and holy in itself, unless it proceeds from a good intention; for what is good must be so in all its circumstances.

How many works that we now look on as holy, will appear in quite different colors when the infallible Judge will examine them on that great day! Then we shall see to our astonishment that those alone will receive a beautiful crown who, while on earth, used to eat and drink well; and many another will have little or no reward, who used to fast and suffer hunger and thirst, because the former ate and drank with a good motive, while the latter did not direct his fasting to the honor of God. We shall see one who gave merely a farthing or a cup of cold water in charity, because he had nothing more to give, possess eternal riches; while another, who gave away many pounds to the poor, will be sent away empty-handed, because the former gave what he had to the poor of Christ with a good intention, but the latter, with all his almsgiving, had some other motive in view, such as vainglory and a desire to be thought generous by men, or to get some work out of the poor whom he helped, that is, rather paying a fairly earned wage than giving alms. Then we shall see that many a one shall be condemned to hell on account of the alms he gave, because he bestowed them out of unjustly acquired property that he could have restored to its lawful owner, or because he had an unlawful motive in giving alms, such as enticing some person to have a sinful affection for him. Then we shall see what a great difference there will be between the rewards of two men who at the same time were present at the same devotion, heard the same

sermon, or said the same prayers; one was animated by the desire to fulfill the will of God, the other was influenced by mere curiosity, and the wish to have his ears tickled, or to be seen by others.

Most people pass their lives in idleness and uselessly, not because they do evil, not because they omit doing good, but because they have not a pure intention in their actions. They live and hardly know why; they suffer, labor, run here and there, give themselves no end of trouble, and think of nothing but that they must do these things because their condition requires it, because they are compelled to do them. They seem to me to act like little children when they are sent on a message. You say to a little boy: Run off at once! and the boy runs away at full speed. Stop, I cry out to him; do you know where you are going? I am going to that house there, he says. But, I ask, do you know what you have to do when you get there? That's true, he answers; I don't know that. You must wait, then, till I tell you. So we often act. We run hither and thither like senseless children we work, and neither know nor think for what purpose.

I conclude in the words of St. Paul, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." Whatever you undertake, give God a share of it; do not forget the good intention. Nor must you be satisfied, as most people are, with merely saying in the morning, I offer up all my thoughts, words, and actions this day to the honor and glory of God. That is, indeed, a good and praiseworthy habit; but that intention seldom holds good for the day, for if even a venial sin, and many of them are apt to be committed, if a venial sin, I say, that is contrary to that intention, creeps in, the intention is revoked and is of no value for the next action, so that it should be renewed often during the day, and especially at the beginning of each work. One of the hermits had this habit: whenever he began at action, he stood still for a short time, as if he was pondering on some weighty matter. Being asked why he did that, he said: How does the marksman act when he is about to shoot at the target? He shuts the left eye, and takes aim with the right, until he has caught the bull's eye; nor does he shoot until he has made sure of not missing his aim. That is what I do; I close the left eye that is, I put away all vain and worldly thoughts, and direct my action to God, as the only end and aim I have in view, by the good intention, that I may not miss what I aim at. Nearly similar was the custom of the early Christians; before beginning anything they made the sign of the cross, as if to say: I do this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, that is, for God's sake. If we did the same on every occasion, what a rich treasure of merits we should store up for eternity! Nor do we require to stand still like the hermit, or to say long prayers. It is easy for us to approach God; there is not a moment in which He does not give audience; a single thought is all that is necessary.

Without a good intention you "walk round about," e. g., you go round in a circle, like a horse in the treadmill, who begins in the morning walking round and round in the wheel, and in the evening he is still going round in the same place, where he began in the morning, not a foot farther does he go because he goes round in a circle, and never gets farther than the circumference of it. So uselessly and wretchedly we spend our lives. We sow much and bring in little. We earn wages and put them into a bag with holes (Agg. 1:6). One day passes after another without profit, until death is at the door, and "the child shall die a hundred years old."

(Is. 45:20). We grow old in years, but (for the want of the good intention in our daily actions) are still babies in merit, when we journey into eternity. Amen.

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