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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 + + +

Volume 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### Presumptuously Scrutinizing the Divine Decrees

*"But now they are hidden from thy eyes."* St. Luke 19:42.

It is not over the impending destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus weeps. It was the precious souls of the inhabitants that forced Him to weep; for He foresaw that in spite of the frequent lights granted them, and the many mercies they had experienced, they would remain obdurate in their wickedness and be lost forever. But why so? Could not the Almighty Son of God, who is so desirous of our salvation, give to those people more powerful graces, which, as He could foresee, would enable them to repent and be saved? No doubt He could have done so. Why, then, did He not give those graces? You must not be too curious in examining those decrees, much less should you complain of or find fault with them, but rather humbly submit to and adore them. Still there are many Christians who cannot reserve their curiosity and judgment on them till the last day; already they begin to criticize them in thought and to ask why God does this or that in such a manner, and not otherwise. Nay, they even find fault with Him, and say that He acts unjustly. This is evident from their frequent complaints. What have I done to God that He should punish me thus? Is it right that I should have so much to suffer, that God should permit things to take such a course? Refrain from such thoughts! Be not scandalized at the most holy works of God! What folly and presumption that you should dare to criticize and condemn God and His inscrutable decrees, the knowledge and understanding of which He has chosen to keep from all till the last day!

*It is folly and presumption to examine and pronounce upon the decrees and arrangements of divine Providence; much worse to criticize or find fault with them.*

What a man cannot and should not understand he should let alone; and it is folly for him to try to indulge a useless curiosity regarding such a matter, and still worse for him to presume to condemn it. What would you think, asks St. Augustine, of a man born deaf, who sees a man speaking or moving his lips, or a choir of musicians, of whom one is playing the organ with his fingers, another is blowing a horn, a third opening his mouth and singing, a fourth playing the fiddle, a fifth moving his arms and beating time; what would you think if the deaf man were to condemn those different movements and gestures of the musicians as a useless and foolish piece of nonsense, for he knows not what music is? Alexander the Great used often to visit the celebrated painter Apelles; on one occasion, as he was discussing the subject of painting with more earnestness than usual, Apelles took him aside and whispered to him to drop the matter, lest the boys who were mixing the colors should laugh at him. His meaning was that Alexander, no matter how well he might understand the art of war, knew nothing about painting, and therefore could not talk sensibly about it.

There you have an example of the foolish presumption of those men who curiously scrutinize the wonderful works of God's Providence in this life, and try to find out why things are arranged in this or that manner, forming rash judgments about them, and finding fault with them, as if God could or should have managed

better. Why is this man born amongst Turks, and that other amongst Christians? Why was the true faith introduced so late into some countries, many souls meanwhile being eternally lost, while other lands received the light much sooner? Why is a country so largely infected with heresy, and another altogether free from it? Why are so many innocent peoples harried by war, while others live in peace? Why must the descendants bear the punishment of the sins of their ancestors, although the latter got off scot-free? Why is this man rich, that one poor? These curious questions and many similar ones often trouble our minds. Why has God made such arrangements? Are they quite right and just? Oh, poor, blind, deaf, and ignorant mortal! Why do you trouble yourself about things you cannot and should not understand as yet? God has, indeed, sometimes revealed things to His special friends; thus He told Abraham of His firm determination to destroy the city of Sodom, and to make him the father of a numerous progeny. He made known to Noe His intention of punishing the world by a deluge. In the same manner God made known many things to other Prophets and Saints. But, according to the general Providence by which the world is ruled, the divine decrees remain hidden and concealed from men. What do you know about the decrees and dispensations of God's providence? You either understand them or you do not. If you understand them, you must acknowledge that they are wise and just; but if they are beyond your intellect, as you must confess, why do you examine, condemn and criticize them? If I speak Latin to you, and you have not studied that language, you know not and cannot guess what I wish to say to you; much less should you venture to find fault with my manner of speaking; how, then, can you pretend to criticize the language of divine Providence, which is much above your comprehension? How can you think or dare to ask whether all that God has done is done well and wisely? With reason, therefore, does the Apostle reprove you: "Oh, man, who art thou that repliest against God," or darest to examine His hidden decrees? "Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it: Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20.)

Did God perhaps consult you when He made His all-wise arrangements about yourself and all His creatures? It would be gross insolence and presumption for a subject to presume to investigate or to understand the reason of all the commands, prohibitions, and actions of his prince or king. You do not even tell your neighbor or fellow-citizen, your own equal, your private designs, or why you have made this or that arrangement in your household; and if he were to ask you about those things you would at once tell him to mind his own business, and remind him that you are master in your own house and can do therein what you please. Yet you are presumptuous enough to investigate the reasons which the great common Father of all has in dealing with his vast household, the world! And you expect him to disclose all his secrets to you, and to explain why he has done so and not otherwise! Remember what you are; forget not that you are a mere mortal, and acknowledge humbly that the wisdom displayed by God in His works is altogether too high for you to understand it.

You cannot understand such things, and therefore you should humbly adore what is above your comprehension. "Seek not the things that are too high for thee, and search not into things above thy ability: but the things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always, and in many of His works be not curious. For many things are shown to thee above the understanding of men. And the suspicion of them hath deceived many" (Ecclus. 3:22-25). A certain young man at Cordova was carrying a basket of fruit covered with a cloth; a friend met him and asked him what he had in the basket: "I should not have covered it," answered the young man, "if I had wished people to know what it was." The same answer was once given to that great friend of God, St. Anthony. He was wondering at the strange dispensations of divine Providence, and in his simplicity, and with his usual confidence in treating with God, he commenced to complain; "my good God," he said, "why dost thou permit sinners to live so long, while thou takest so soon out of the world good men, whose lives might be useful?" And he heard the following answer: "Anthony, what is it to thee? Look to thyself. These are decrees which God wishes to keep from the eyes of men, and it is not for thee to find fault with them. God would not have concealed them from thee if He had wished thee to know them."

We must in this respect humbly acknowledge and say: "I can always and with reason say that I know not the secret, and the divine decrees are hidden from me." Hence if any dispensation of Providence seems strange to me, and I begin to doubt of its justice, I cannot think anything more reasonable than: I know not the secret; I do not understand the divine decrees. And if any one asks me why God has ordained or permitted this or that; why the wicked man is rich, the good man poor and despised; why the poor laborer has many children, the mighty prince none! I can give no better answer than to say: I know not; the decrees of God are beyond my understanding; nor do I now wish to know them, since God is not pleased that I should do so. Nor is this

ignorance unbecoming even to the most learned and the wisest of men; for it is necessary to know what we can and ought to know, but it is presumption and folly to seek to find out what is beyond our ken.

The time shall come when we shall know all about them namely, on the last day, at the end of the world when the Almighty shall publicly, in the sight of all men, angels, and demons justify the dispensations of His Providence. Now he acts like a painter; while the artist is actually engaged in his work, and the painting is yet unfinished, he does not wish any one to see it; therefore he closes his workshop, or else hangs a screen before the work, that no one may look at it. No one would dare to blame the work in the artist's workshop; but you do not hesitate to blame the Almighty in what he does in the world. Hear the warning that St. Paul gives: "Judge not before the time, until the Lord come;" wait till the work of God is completed. If many things now seem inconsistent and incomprehensible to you, remember that the work of this world is not by any means finished; there is still much to be done on it, as if it were a piece of a painting. Since you cannot and should not now understand the design of the almighty Artist, wait till the last day of the world, on which God will show in public in the valley of Josaphat the whole work of His Providence, and will allow every one to see how admirably and wisely everything has been done; then we shall all see to our great admiration what a beautiful work it is.

Let us then ascribe everything that happens in the world, sin alone excepted, to the Providence of God, and since we cannot understand His decrees submit humbly to them without further question or doubt, and resign ourselves with contented minds to the divine will. Here we should profit by the beautiful words of St. Augustine when examining and speaking in the person of Adam of the command not to eat the forbidden fruit. He says: If the tree is good, why may I not eat of its fruit? But if it is bad, why is it in paradise? God might answer both these questions by saying: The tree is in paradise because I have chosen to place it there; but I do not wish you to eat its fruit, because I desire to have in you an obedient and not a disobedient servant. But why so? Because you are the servant and I am your Lord; this sole reason should suffice for you. It was only the hellish serpent that said cunningly and craftily: "Why hath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?" (Gen. 3:1). He should have said: Why do you not eat of this tree? Then Eve might easily have answered him: Because God has forbidden us. But the deceitful, hellish foe put the question another way: "Why hath God commanded you?"

Whenever we know that God wishes us to do something, it is not for us to ask why he so wishes it. The most powerful reason for anything is that God so wills it; God has decreed it; God has ordained it; God has done it. The highest justice is the will and ordination of God; the highest wisdom to allow one's self quietly and with confidence to be ruled in all things by His holy will and all-wise providence. Sometimes parents say to one of their children: Go to school and study; to another, stay at home and help your father at his work; to a third, come into the garden and take a walk with me. If the children are naughty they will at once commence to murmur and say: Why should I study? Why must I work, while he goes to the garden? But if they are obedient, well-reared children, as all Christian children should be, they do not hesitate a moment, but at once and willingly fulfill their parents' commands. Yes, they say, I will do whatever my father or mother wishes. In the same manner should we, as obedient children of God in all circumstances, in all dispensations of divine Providence, think and say: Father! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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