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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 one = THE BAD CHRISTIAN
TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

The Unhappy Death of the Avaricious

“O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust.” St. Luke 11:18.

The Pharisee had good reason to thank God that he was not addicted to extortion and injustice; if he had only done so with real, humble gratitude to God. What a great thing it would be for us if we could all say of ourselves, with truth and Christian humility: Thank God! I am not given to extortion and injustice. Avarice and injustice are not many degrees removed from each other; for the former is generally the root of the latter, because the avaricious man neglects God during life by omitting good and doing evil, and committing all kinds of sin. But I have now to add something far more terrible.

I. The avaricious man dies without true repentance.

II. He generally dies without restitution.

I. As we live, so shall we die; a good life is followed by a happy death; a bad life by an unhappy death; therefore, since the avaricious man neglects God during life, he will also neglect him at the hour of death. It is true that such is the case with all wicked men who live bad lives and put off repentance till the hour of death, for, as a general rule, they die without true sorrow for their sins; still, it is especially the case with the avaricious. Other vicious habits disappear with age; for one either loses all taste for them since he has found that they cannot content him, or else the bodily strength required to indulge in them is wanting. Avarice, alone, does not yield to the influence of years or old age; on the contrary, it increases more and more, and as years go on it strikes deeper root. As a matter of experience, we see that old people are the most avaricious. No matter how wicked a man may be who is given to other vices, when he sees his last hour approaching he tries to make peace with God; but it would be a miracle if a miser, whose god was money, should be converted!

No doubt he will confess his other sins and receive Holy Communion; but what devotion can he have, or love of God, whom he still loves less than his money? What kind of sorrow can he have for his inordinate and sinful greed of riches, when his greatest and only grief is that he must now leave his beloved money for ever? There is no use in speaking to him of the eternal treasures and joys of heaven; that is a happiness for which he never had any desire, and which he would now willingly renounce if he could only remain on earth with his treasures. No use in speaking to him of the eternal pains of hell; his heart has no room for any such salutary thought, because it is filled with the love of gold, and is insensible to all supernatural ideas. What means had not

Jesus, who is the Master of hearts, employed to turn Judas from his wicked design? Frequently, in the presence of his other Apostles, he had had recourse both to exhortation and example to inspire him with contempt for earthly things; he promised heaven to him:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (St. Matthew 5:3); he spoke of the exceeding great reward which shall be given to those who leave all things for his sake:

“And every one that hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother or lands... shall receive a hundredfold and shall possess life everlasting” (St. Matthew 19:29). He told him of hell and its eternal misery, when he warned him at the Last Supper: “Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man shall be betrayed; it were better for him if that man had not been born” (St. Matthew 26:24). He even went down on his knees, washed and dried his feet. Certainly, a heart of stone might have been softened then. But Judas remained as obdurate as ever; the thirty pieces of silver which had been promised him had taken possession of his heart, and for their sake he was quite willing to renounce his apostleship and to deliver Jesus, whom he knew to be the Son of God, to his enemies and murderers.

With a few words Jesus humbled the pride of James and John when they asked for the highest place in his kingdom:

“You know not what you ask” (St. Matthew 20:22). A single look was enough to fill Peter with sorrow and contrition for having denied him. To cure the unbelief of Thomas, he merely allowed him to touch his wounds. The Samaritan woman was living in impurity, but a short conversation with Christ converted her. Magdalen was a public sinner, possessed by seven devils, but her heart was touched by a few words of the Saviour, and she was converted. Avarice alone was the obstinate vice that he could not cure, in spite of all the means he adopted; when all the people who heard him preach believed in him and followed him, the covetous Pharisees alone stood aloof, deriding him. For the same reason he failed to touch the heart of Judas, and could not bring him to repentance. Even while the act of treachery was being accomplished he took pity on the traitor, and said to him, in order to encourage him to repent:

“Friend, whereto art thou come?” (St. Matthew 26:50.) But all in vain. Avarice brought the traitor so far that at last he hanged himself in despair. How fruitless it is to preach penance to the avaricious, when even God has not succeeded in converting them! And why? Because they have lost their hearts, and the devil possesses them. And so it is in reality; the avaricious have no heart either for themselves or God. You have heard, doubtless, of that rich miser who died suddenly; when his body was opened he was found to be without a heart; the bystanders were astonished, and wondered what sort of an illness it was that had thus eaten away his heart; but the mystery was soon cleared up. When the heir opened the chest in which the dead man used to keep his money, he saw the heart of the unhappy man in the claws of a devil, who, in the appearance of a small but terrible dragon, sat on the heap of gold, and uttered the following words: “This gold and silver is the price of the heart which your friend sold me, so that it is mine by right.” Having frequently repeated the words, “the heart is mine, the heart is mine,” the dragon flew away, taking the heart with him to hell. Thus the avaricious man neglects God in the hour of death, since, generally speaking, he dies without true sorrow for his sins, even if he has not been guilty of any injustice. How much more is he not apt to neglect God, after having committed many acts of injustice to which he was impelled by greed of gain? Oh, surely in such a case there is no hope of a true conversion, since he dies without making restitution.

II. It is absolutely necessary to restore what one possesses unjustly when one can restore it to its lawful owner, no matter how one has come by it; and without such restitution there is no pardon for sin, no hope of heaven. But what a difficult and unusual thing it is for men to make restitution! In the Holy Scriptures we find hardly any example of restitution having been actually made, except in the case of Judas, who brought back the thirty pieces of silver; but even this restitution did not come from a love of justice; it was an act of despair on the part of one who had made up his mind to hang himself, and not to try to save his soul. The elder Tobias wished to give back the kid that he erroneously thought to be stolen. Zaccheus said to Christ: “If I have wronged any man of anything I restore him fourfold” (St. Luke 19:8). But the Gospel does not say that he wronged any one. Humanly speaking, it is impossible for an unjust and avaricious man, who is at the point of death, to make restitution. For how can he remember all the unjust tricks he has had recourse to in his business, and how, when, where, and whom he has wronged? Can he say how much he has unjustly taken from others? “The men of riches,” says the Psalmist, “have found nothing in their hands” (Ps. 75:6), or “they have not found

their hands.” Whenever there is question of keeping or receiving, the avaricious find their hands easily enough; but they have no hands to give back or to make restitution. Ill-gotten goods are like the bait which conceals the hook; a hungry fish swallows the bait, and loses its life in consequence, for either it is hauled into the boat, or else it breaks the line, and goes off with the hook in its mouth, from which it will never be able to free itself. The avaricious man who has ill-gotten goods, suffers from a similar misfortune: he has swallowed, with the bait, a hook which will cause him eternal death. He is exhorted to give back what he has wrongfully acquired, to reject what he has swallowed; but that is what he refuses to do, until the Almighty God takes it from him violently by death.

But, it may be objected, restitution cannot be such a difficult thing for one who stands face to face with death. Why should he desire to keep what he cannot use? True, there is a good deal in that remark; but it does not apply to deep-seated avarice. If the avaricious man cannot enjoy his wealth himself, he still clings to the idea of leaving it to his heirs, in whose persons he imagines he can continue to live. This is the extreme of folly, into which a man is hurried by love of money. He takes great care that others should live well after he is gone; but he does not think of the unhappy death that is in store for him. Christ says: “Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (St. John 15:13). Does it not seem that the avaricious man has a still greater love, or, rather, madness, since he gives up for his friends, not the life of the body, but that of the immortal soul, by being ready to sacrifice his hopes of heaven and to condemn himself to hell rather than impoverish them by making restitution of what he has unjustly acquired?

It is related of a certain rich man, who, a few hours before his death, sent for a notary to make his will. When the notary arrived he said to him: Sit down and write as I shall dictate to you; this is my last will; after my death I bequeath my body to the earth, from which it came, but my soul I give to the devil, to whom it belongs. All the bystanders were horror-stricken at this. Go on, said the dying man; write as I tell you; I give my soul to the devil, and also, as far as I can, I give him the souls of my wife and children. My soul I give to him, because I have made a good deal here and there in my business that does not of right belong to me; my wife’s soul, because she has made me commit many acts of injustice in order to support her extravagance; and the souls of my children, because I neither can nor will make restitution, so as not to leave them poor. Having said these words, he breathed his last.

The accursed greed of gold forces men to sacrifice heaven, their souls and their God for all eternity. Now you understand that terrible woe that the meek Saviour threatens to those rich men whose hearts are attached to their wealth: “Woe to you that are rich.” The vain world thinks you fortunate; men, blinded by the glitter of your wealth, look upon you with envy, and wish they were like you; but woe to you! And why? Not only because it costs you so much labor and trouble to gain wealth, so much care to preserve it, so much fear and anxiety lest the least accident should deprive you of it; so that with all your riches your lives are full of torment-and uneasiness. Woe to you. And why? Not only because your gold cannot make you contented and happy, since the desire of it increases every day, and so keeps you constantly on the rack, without ever giving you time to enjoy it. Woe to you. And why? Not merely because your avarice prevents you from using and enjoying your wealth, so that you live as miserably as if you had nothing. Woe to you. And why? Not only because death will compel you to relinquish your treasures, as the hunter compels the dog to give up the game it has seized; so that you must go into eternity without being able to bring with you a single farthing of the money you loved so much. But, woe to you, especially, because even at the hour of death you refuse to make due restitution, and die without true repentance, and thus are lost forever! Woe to you!

I am afraid that there are very few who derive any profit from this sermon, because people either refuse to acknowledge that they are avaricious, although they are in reality infected with that vice, or else they maintain that very few are addicted to it. The poor, and those of the middle class, will not see much in this sermon to apply to themselves. They will think that what I have said is for the rich alone. We have not much money, they will say; we have no large revenues, and therefore we have not the chance of being avaricious. Oh, Christians! You make a mistake; I have not said that avarice consists in possessing much wealth, but in an inordinate desire and love of money and worldly goods; a love which the poorest as well as the richest may have. The love of money is so general that it may be found in the midst of poverty and want; while poverty of spirit is to be seen in the midst of wealth. What better are you for being poor outwardly, if you are inwardly consumed with a thirst for money? If, in your poverty, or mediocrity, you are dissatisfied with the will of God and murmur because He

has not given you more of the goods of this world; if you are always busy with plans and contrivances to become rich; if you envy others because they have more than you; if you are as ready to lie and swear falsely for a dollar as another is for a thousand dollars; if you are always on the watch to seize hold of everything you can find, whether you have a right to it or not, how will your poverty help you to heaven in that case? You are rich in spirit, although poor in reality; you are avaricious at heart, although you have no money.

“Beware of all covetousness” (St. Luke 12:15); do not allow yourselves to be possessed by greed of gold. You who are rich, make friends to yourselves with your riches, that they may hereafter receive you into heaven; remember that God has lent much to you that you may share it with his poor servants; nor can you make a better use of your money than to place it in their hands, that they may forward it on to eternity for you. You who are poor, console yourselves: “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasures without content” (Prov. 15:16), which cannot bring happiness. “Better is a dry morsel with joy, than a house full of victims with strife” (Prov. 17:1); it is better to have but a dry crust, and to be at peace with God, than to sit at a well supplied table with a heart filled with care. Amen.

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