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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

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Prayer before Confession

“He struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” St. Luke 18:13.

What cannot humble prayer obtain from God? A great, public, and notorious sinner gains more by simply striking his breast, and heaving a penitent sigh, with the few words, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner,” than the proud Pharisee with all his fasting, alms-deeds, and other good works. “I say to you,” such is the testimony our Lord gives on the matter, “this man went down into his house justified rather than the other.” Sinners, behold the true pattern of a penitent! You must imitate the public sinner, if you are really determined to get rid of the filth of your sins in the Sacrament of Penance and to return to God with your whole hearts.

I. The sinner who wishes to return to God by a good confession must pray to God with humility.

II. While the sinner must pray with the publican: “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner,” the just man must also pray that he may preserve the grace of God.

I. No one can do the least good work deserving of a supernatural reward, unless he is helped by the grace of God. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine,” says our Lord, “so neither can you, unless you abide in me. For without me you can do nothing” (St. John 15:4, 5). Who in these words instructs the hearts of the humble, that they may not be exalted by their good works, but humbly ascribe every good thing that is in them to the grace and mercy of God; and stops the mouths of the proud, who attribute everything to themselves and to their own strength. “Without me you can do nothing.” He does not say, without me you can do only a little, but, nothing, not even the least thing, can you do without me. Now, if this is undoubtedly true of the just man, who being in the state of grace, is a friend and child of God, how much less can the sinner do penance and recover the friendship of God by his own efforts? According to the decree of the Council of Trent, “if any one says that a man can believe, hope, love, or repent properly, without the previous inspiration and assistance of the Holy Ghost let him be anathema.” Mark the words, “do penance properly.” The traitor Judas did penance, as the Gospel says: “Judas repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and ancients” (St. Matthew 27:3).

Full of sorrow, he confessed his sin. “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood” (Ibid. 4). But his repentance was not of the right sort, and it did not obtain for him the forgiveness of his sin. It was a mere natural sorrow, that deprived him of all hopes of happiness, and reduced him to despair. “He departed, and went and hanged himself with a halter” (Ibid. 5).

1. What do you do, unhappy mortal, when you break the commandments of God by committing mortal sin? You deliberately put out your own eyes, and deprive yourself of the light of your soul. "They shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord" (Soph. 1:17). They will stumble from one fault into another. And how can you recover your sight? Who can restore it to you? None other but he, of whom St. John says: "That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (St. John 1:9). He it is who wishes to be appealed to in the words of the blind man: "Lord, that I may see" (St. Luke 18:41). Hear St. Augustine, in his soliloquy with God: "Too late have I known thee, O true Light."

2. And what have you done besides, unhappy mortal, when you sinned grievously? You deliberately cast yourself down into the depths of the abyss: "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, condemneth" (Prov. 18:3). And how are you to come forth from that abyss? Ah, to no purpose would you strive; you would be lost and buried forever, if God did not stretch forth his hand to you and help you by his grace. Besides, you have fettered yourself in this abyss with so many chains, and have shut the door so fast on yourself, that you have made it almost impossible for you to come out; as the penitent David deplores: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me" (Ps. 118:61); so that even if I wished, I could not free myself. To break these chains, to open the door of this prison, is in his power alone, who saith in the Apocalypse: "I have the keys of death and of hell (Apoc. 1:18); and who has said to Peter, "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (St. Matthew 16:19). "And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven" (St. Matthew 16:19).

3. Finally, unhappy mortal, when you commit mortal sin, you cruelly murder yourself, inasmuch as you take away the life of your poor soul. "If I do as they ask me, and commit sin," said the chaste Susanna, when straitened by the godless elders, it will be the death of my soul, "But it is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord" (Dan. 13:23). I would rather die a thousand times, than sin before the Lord, and thereby inflict eternal death on my soul. Once dead, O sinner, who will, who can recall your soul to life again? Ah, that is not in your own power. That requires the almighty power of God. If he, by his grace, does not call you forth, like another Lazarus, from the grave of sin, you are and must remain dead forever. There is no other means for you to regain life, but the help of God.

From this it follows, in the first place, that he who is guilty of grievous sin is most presumptuous; for he deliberately places himself in a state from which it is impossible for him to free himself by his own unassisted efforts. God is not bound to give the sinner the grace of true repentance; and, yet, no man can repent sincerely without that grace.

It follows, in the second place, that the sinner acts most rashly towards his poor soul, when he defers repentance, in the face of those good inspirations, thoughts, and graces which God bestows on him. For he does not know whether he will ever again be offered the help that God now offers him. It is the same as if he said: *I know, O Lord, that thou wilt now restore my sight*, and that if thou dost not do so, I shall be in darkness forever; but I do not wish to see the light as yet; if thou offerest it to me at some other time, I will accept it. *Thou stretchest out thy beneficent hand to help me out of the depths of the abyss*, into which I have willfully cast myself, but thou mayest go away now; I prefer to remain here a little longer; hereafter, when it suits me better, thou mayest return and help me out. *Thou art willing to break the chains that keep me bound in the slavery of the devil*; but I do not wish to *be set at liberty* now. Hereafter, when I shall have changed my mind, thou mayest do what thou art willing to do now. *Thou desirest to free my soul now from eternal death*; but I do not wish to live at present. At some future time, thou mayest render me that service, and help me to arise from the grave. Ah, presumptuous mortal! how can you dare to entertain such thoughts? "Today, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94:8). Now, at this moment, if you hear the voice of God calling to you, do not close your ears, but accept the proffered grace, for it may never be offered you again.

II. Hence, it follows that the sinner must humbly beg of God the grace of true repentance and conversion, so that what he is unable to do by his own natural powers may become possible to him by the help of divine grace. It is true that the merciful God is always ready and willing to give to the repenting sinner the grace of conversion, and he has assured us of this with an oath: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezech. 33:11). Mark the desire that the Lord has to help all sinners; so great is it, that he calls it his life, as it were. If a man does anything very willingly it is said to be his life; thus, eating and drinking is his life; hunting is his life; study is his life, and the meaning of that is,

that the man finds his greatest pleasure in those Occupations. “As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way.” My greatest pleasure, my life, is to help him and show him mercy. Nevertheless, God does not force his help and grace on any unwilling soul. He desires to be asked for them: “Ask,” he says, “and you shall receive” (St. John 16:24). Sometimes, it is true, the Lord knocks uninvited at the door of certain hearts. He gives the sinner powerful inspirations and graces to urge him to repent, so that his heart is filled to overflowing with contrition and sorrow, although he never asked those graces from God, and was actually continuing to commit sin, without the least thought of repentance. But such cases are, so to speak, miracles and wonders of the divine mercy. It would be great presumption to expect anything of the kind in one’s own case. As a general rule, God gives his grace to those who are prepared to receive it. The first grace is usually a salutary thought and desire of the sinner to be converted; from this desire, springs the impulse to pray humbly to God for the grace of true repentance. But if that prayer be neglected, the other graces are withheld; and frequently, they are never offered the sinner again.

Therefore, pray humbly and fervently, like the publican in today’s Gospel, knowing that you can do nothing of yourselves: “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” Pray, not only in the ordinary way, before confession, that you may know the number of your sins; but, what is more important, pray for true contrition and sorrow, that you may return to God with all your heart. And you especially, obdurate sinners, who have neither wish nor desire to do penance, and who think it impossible to give up your sinful habits, and amend your lives, do not become so desperate as to renounce prayer altogether. Send up your sighs to heaven, and cry out daily with the blind man, “Lord, that I may see!” Be merciful to me, a sinner, that I may not die impenitent! So you should pray, if you are still in the state of sin and feel no desire to repent; and you should also be diligent in hearing sermons, for the good God is specially generous with his graces when the faithful are assembled to hear his word.

And you, just souls, learn from what has been said to be truly humble of heart. Do not imagine that, if you have been hitherto free from mortal sin, or have committed less sin than others, that this is to be ascribed to your own natural strength. The same God, whose grace is necessary to enable the sinner to do penance, must also keep the just from falling into sin. All Christians, without exception, must pray daily, “lead us not into temptation,” that is: Help us, O Lord, that we may not be separated from thee and thy friendship by any temptation! Keep us from those occasions and allurements in which thou foreseest that our weakness would lead us into sin! Think and say often, with humility and thankfulness: If thou, O Lord, hadst not preserved me in so many dangerous occasions of sin, if thou hadst not borne me in thy hands by thy powerful grace, into how many grievous sins might I not have fallen? And therefore I say, with St. Augustine, “I attribute it to thy mercy and grace that thou hast freed me from my sins, and that I have avoided whatever evil I have not committed. May thy grace, O Lord, always prevent and follow us, and grant that we may be always intent on good works, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.” Amen.

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