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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 3 = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Sign of Vainglory, and the Means of Guarding against it

*“He hath done all things well.”* Mark 7:37.

Such praise cannot be given to any one during this life, for a vain, deceitful, useless thing is the praise that comes from men who are ignorant of what they say and are blinded by passion, so that they cannot form a correct judgment; but the beauty of that praise consists in its being given by God after this life. Who of us will dare to assert that those words, “he hath done all things well,” can be said of himself with truth? To do everything well is to do all that God wills us to do, to do it when God *wills, as God wills, and because God wills*. Ah, how often we are wanting in these points! What are we to do in this regard? We must study

*I. The signs whereby, we may detect whether we are given to vainglory and are apt to be influenced by human respect in our actions;*

*II. The means to be used against this vice, so that we may perform all our works with a pure intention for God alone.*

I. Amongst all the vices there is none *so common, so subtle, so hidden and secret* as vainglory. None more *common*, I say; for where is the man alive who can say that he was never assailed by it, and that he never yielded to it in the least? Where is the man who does not sometimes wish and seek to be honored and praised by others? Where is the man who has not at least a secret pleasure in such praise? Who does not rejoice in his heart when he sees that his actions are admired and applauded by others? Whoever he is who can say that of himself with truth, he is indeed a great man. When Satan brought our Lord to the pinnacle of the temple, and said, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down” (St. Matthew 4:6), the evil spirit thought that vainglory might conquer him, whom gluttony failed to conquer. He wished to persuade our Lord to fly through the air, that the people might see and admire him. In this the tempter hoped to succeed with our Lord as he had with many others; for he knew well by experience that those who cannot be caught in any other way often allow themselves to be deceived by vainglory. For it is not an easy thing, not to be tickled by the praise and applause of men. In a word, all men condemn vainglory as an abominable vice; all are ashamed to be looked on as vain; nevertheless there is hardly one in the world who does not suffer more or less from this malady.

It is a most *subtle* vice, for it can creep in unawares anywhere; for example, if I fast as I ought, and observe the rules of temperance, I am assailed by idle self-complacency, inasmuch as I imagine that I will be looked on as holy. If I eat and drink and enjoy myself, so as not to be considered scrupulous, I seek to gain a good name

among the children of the world, as one who knows how to live and to get on with people. If I am well dressed, vain glory suggests that I am looked on as rich and noble; if I am dressed poorly or modestly, according to the rules of the Gospel, I am assailed by the thought that I shall be considered as one who despises the world. If I speak eloquently and in fitting terms of a subject, I am in immediate danger of being overcome by vanity, because I shall pass among those who are listening to me as learned and talented; if I keep silent and say nothing of things that I am not ignorant of, my silence will be esteemed prudence. No matter what I do, I am never safe from the attacks of this crafty and cunning foe. Nay, even the contempt of honors, the avoiding of idle praise and reputation, the humiliation and abasement of myself, cannot protect me from the risk I run by acquiring a name for humility, which is the most beautiful of the Christian virtues and the one most necessary for a holy life.

Often a rich and noble gentleman, with all his wealth and magnificence, is not so self-complacent as a poor hermit in his rags, because the latter imagines that he is trampling the pride of the world under foot; a noble lady has sometimes less pride in her splendid apparel than the poor peasant girl in the coarse, blue apron and new woolen gown with which she comes to church on Sundays and holy-days to let herself be admired. Not without reason does our Lord warn us in the Gospel: "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But, lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (St. Matthew 6:19, 20). Nevertheless vainglory manages to get at the treasures that we had laid up in heaven by our good works, when on account of those works we give way to pride and look down on others.

Finally, vainglory is a *secret* and *most hidden* vice; it attacks us before we are aware of it; we seek the praise of men, and hardly know that we are doing so. If the vice is of such a nature that it can creep unawares into our works, how are we to know that we are given to it, and that we seek the praise of men in our ordinary actions?

1. The first and most certain sign of this malady is *boasting*, when one loves to speak of the good actions he has performed. We have an example of it in the Pharisee who stood before the altar and there boasted of his fasting and almsgiving. The Pharisee did not lie; nay, he told the truth about himself; for he really fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed; but every one that exalteth himself offends, although he speaks the truth; for, though the Pharisee was in a better state than the publican when he entered the temple, he went out condemned. There are people who, when they get scent of the least thing that is to their praise, cannot keep it silent, but must out with it to every one they meet; I was there at the time, they say; I did this or that; I managed the matter in this way; so-and-so has to thank me for his success; if those people had not taken my advice, they would not have done so well. If I had been there, I should have managed matters differently; if that person had done what I suggested, he would be better off now, and so on. This is an evident sign that one does not seek the glory of God, but his own glory from men. The same boasting can be done in silence; if, namely, he who says nothing of what he does nevertheless is pleased that men should know of it and admire him for it; they are like children who, when they have a new coat or new shoes, cannot bear to be kept in the house; no, they are all anxiety to rush out into the street and let people see the fine things they have on.

2. The second sign of vainglory and a perverse intention in our actions is to *spy out the judgments and opinions of men, and see how we have pleased them*. Then run down what we do, as is often the case, and then have a secret pleasure in hearing others approve of it, but to be dissatisfied when they condemn it; to excuse in all sorts of ways what they find fault with, throwing the blame on something else off ourselves, or else obstinately defending our mode of action; fearing the hostile opinion of men, or doing out of respect for it some good work with the intention of pleasing them. All this comes from secret pride, vanity, and thirst of praise. He who seeks nothing but God and his glory cares little for the opinion of men; let them think and say what they will, he says, I will do what God wills me to do; whether men approve of it or not matters nothing to me; I did not begin the act on their account, nor will I omit it for them. I require no other witness or approver of my works than the all-seeing God, to whom my heart and conscience are known; if I please him, I am satisfied, and have attained the end I work for.

3. The third sign of vainglory is *to feel a secret envy* when others are placed on an equality with us in the same works, arts, or sciences, or when they show more cleverness than we; to be dissatisfied if we cannot do as well as others; to wish and desire that we should excel all in a certain thing. This envy causes us to feel disappointed when others are praised, to speak very sparingly in praise of them, or, when possible, to belittle

them and talk contemptuously of them. This is again an evident sign that we do not seek God alone in our actions, but rather fear that by the praise others get we may lose something of the good opinion of men.

4. The fourth sign of vainglory is to be down-hearted and troubled when our work is a failure in the eyes of the world, and has not the success we hoped for. He who serves God with a pure intention does not trouble himself about that; for he thinks to himself, I have done my part if I fail to attain the end I work for, it is not my fault; God has not commanded me to succeed; he has merely told me what to do. We must keep in the dispositions which the holy Angels have with regard to those who are entrusted to their charge. They exhort and advise them faithfully; they guard, watch over, and encourage them to good, and do the utmost to bring them to heaven; but if their charges unfortunately make a bad use of their free will, all the good advice and exhortations are neglected, and the unhappy ones hurry on to eternal ruin.

But the Angels feel no chagrin on that account, nor are they the whit less happy; they say, as the angel in the prophecy of Jeremias: "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed: let us forsake her, and let us go every man to his own land;" for, in spite of that, "The Lord hath brought forth our justices" (Jer. 51:9, 10). St. James, when he was in Spain, did not convert more than eight or nine persons to the true faith, in spite of all his labors, while the other Apostles converted whole kingdoms; must we think therefore that his reward was less? No, the Lord received with equal joy him who made ten talents of five, and him who made four of two; for he does not consider the greatness of the gain, but the intention of the will. He does not so much look at the result of the work as at the work itself and the intention with which it is performed.

5. The fifth sign of vainglory is, when we perform our ordinary actions with more fervor, zeal, and devotion *when others are present than when we are alone*. In this we act like beggars; when they see any one coming, they weep and cry out at the top of their voices; when they are alone they are quite still. So, too, there are some servants who are very diligent when any one is looking at them; but if they are left alone in the house, they idle their time away. He who tries to please God with a pure intention finds reason enough for employing all his fervor and zeal in the fact that the all-seeing eye of God is looking at every motion of his heart.

II. Twofold is the origin of vainglory; the first concerns our *understanding and imagination*, inasmuch as we are apt to think highly of what we find out, do, and effect, and to look on it as worthy of praise. The second concerns *our will* with which we arrogate to ourselves the imaginary praise due to our works, and hunt for it eagerly.

1. As far as the understanding and imagination are concerned, the first means of avoiding vainglory is often and deeply to ponder on *what we are, where we come from, what we have of ourselves and can do of ourselves*. Of myself I am nothing; of myself, I have nothing; of myself I know nothing; by myself I can do nothing. All that I am, and have, and know, and can do, comes from God alone. All the evil I have done, still do, and shall do in the future, certainly deserves neither honor nor praise, but rather shame and confusion before God and man. If I consider the good I have done in the past, I have more reason for saying than holy Job had: "I feared all my works, knowing that thou didst not spare the offender" (Job 9:28). For I find that the most of them were tainted with carelessness, pride, vainglory, dislike, willful distractions, and other faults and imperfections which accompanied them; so that I have reason enough to humble myself on account of them and to be ashamed before God and the world.

If I deserve to be punished even for my good acts, what have I to be proud of, or why should I think much of myself? And what I have done, am doing, or shall do without any faults creeping in is an alms that God generously bestows on me quite gratuitously, and I am bound to implore that alms of him like a poor beggar in fervent daily prayer, and further, as his debtor, I must return him heartfelt thanks for his goodness; for it is he alone who can help me to do good. "For without me you can do nothing" (St. John 15:5), says our Lord.

From all this we must conclude that, if we have anything great or praiseworthy in the shape of natural or supernatural gifts, or if we do any great or praiseworthy action before men or privately, not the smallest particle of honor or glory is due to us on that account, but all belongs to God alone, from whom we have received the gifts and by whose help we have performed the actions. Would it not be foolish for a beggar who is admitted into a strange house through pity, fed at a strange table, clothed with the garments of some one else, although the house, the food, and the clothing may be very fine and magnificent, would it not be foolish for the beggar to boast of all those things, and to think a great deal of himself on account of them? Must he not still confess himself to be a poor, needy man, who is dependent on the charity of his benefactor for food, clothing, and

shelter, and who, if left to himself, would have to go about the streets naked and hungry? Would it not be foolish for one who is building a house with other people's money to boast about the fine building? Poor fool, you might say to him, what are you thinking of? You have not given a single stone to that house. It requires no great art to pay with other people's money, or to build at another man's expense. Would it not be foolish for one who seems to be rich, but who is really head and ears in debt, in debt for his clothes, for the bread he eats, in debt to his butcher, his shoemaker, and his workmen, debts that he is bound to pay but has not the means of paying, would it not be foolish for him to boast of his riches, which in reality are nothing but debts? So must I and all men, whoever they are, think; if I have any praiseworthy quality, it is an alms that God has gratuitously bestowed on me through sheer mercy; if I do anything praiseworthy, it is a building for which God pays; all my natural or supernatural gifts of soul and body, all my good actions, all temporal and eternal goods that I possess, are debts that I have incurred with God, that I must pay, that I shall never be able to repay in full and for which I can only return him humble thanks; therefore I would indeed act like a fool if I were to have the least good opinion of myself on account of such things. I must rather acknowledge that not the least praise or honor is due to me.

2. If we stop up this first spring, the other will soon empty itself; that is, after this heartfelt confession on the part of the understanding, the will must necessarily surrender and acknowledge that, unless it wishes to act wickedly, it must never arrogate to itself any praise, but give all the praise and honor to God under all circumstances; and this is the second means of conquering vainglory. First, we must always at the beginning, middle, and end of all our actions hold fast to this intention with the prophet David: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory" (Ps. 113:1). Secondly, when we have performed a praiseworthy action, we must return humble thanks to God, to show that we did it not of ourselves, but by his help. Thirdly, when we are praised by men for our actions, when they talk well of us and honor us, we must imagine that what they say is not for us, but that they are speaking of God; that their words of praise are not directed to us but to God, whom we represent for the time being; and we must say to ourselves: if you mean that for me, you are doing an injustice and are very much mistaken, for it is not I who did the action, but the almighty God who did it by me. Just as, when one says: what a beautiful pen has written that! What a skilful brush has painted that picture! What a practiced hammer has made that work of art! The lifeless tools are never alluded to, although it seems that the whole talk is of them; but in reality the praise is intended for the writer, the painter, the artist who made use of those tools. Hence the will, if it does not wish to act wrongfully and to fall into a mistake, must give all the honor and glory to God whenever it is praised or is otherwise attacked by vainglory.

3. The third means that concerns the will against vainglory is the good intention that we should make every morning and renew frequently during the day, protesting before God and heaven that in all our actions we seek only his honor and glory. If, after that, I am tempted to a vain thought, I can laugh at it and say to it: ah, poor fool! You come too late; another has been here before you, and to him I have given all my works and the glory that comes from them: "To God alone be honor and glory." The last and most necessary means against vainglory is constant prayer to God for a pure intention and an upright heart in all our actions, saying daily with St. Augustine: "My God, grant me to know thee and to know myself, that I may love thee and despise myself!" Amen.

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