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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 + + +

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TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Sufficient though Unequal Graces for Salvation That Are Given to All Men

“What must I do to possess eternal life?” St. Luke 10:2 5.

This question should touch the hearts of all men, because all, without exception, are created for eternal life. A short answer embracing the whole divine law was given to the question: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.” This again holds good for all men, not one excepted; all must love their God with their whole heart and their neighbor as themselves; for such is the will of God. And all can love God and their neighbor, for no one is without the graces and helps which the divine generosity has prepared for all in abundance. Yet, there are people who indulge in curious thoughts and speculations regarding this truth, and doubt whether the goodness of God reaches in this sense to all men; thus they represent the divine goodness and liberality as not so great or lovable as is becoming. Against these I shall in this sermon defend the honor and glory of the general love and mercy of God. From the many doubts that might assail us on this point I select only two, to which nearly all the others may be reduced.

- I. Not all men seem to have frequent graces to gain heaven.*
- II. Not all men have equal helps to gain heaven.*

If storks, swallows and other birds know instinctively how to find their way, although no one has taught them, across the high seas into those warm countries where they remain during the winter, and are able to return again at the beginning of spring; if the bees without a master are able to find the flowers from which they suck the honey; if stags, bears, dogs, cats, and almost all other animals can find without a master healing herbs when they are sick, to restore themselves to health; if the rivers can find the sea, and all the elements their center and point of rest, to which without any guide they are borne of themselves and by a natural inclination, and in which they finally repose: who can believe that there should be so many men on earth who know nothing of God, or of their last end, or of the means by which they may attain it? If no country is so remote, so wild and barbarous as not to receive the benefit of the sun, the stars, the winds, rains, and other things that are necessary for the preservation of the life of the body, who can believe that the means of saving the everlasting life of the immortal soul should alone be wanting to it? If all men, even in the wilds of heathendom, have their guardian Angels at their side, to protect, guide, and keep them, who can believe that these Angels do not, according to their office, give the souls entrusted to them the inspirations necessary for their salvation? If Jesus Christ suffered and died for the salvation of all men, who can believe that He will not also give to all that without which His blood and life would be sacrificed in vain? If God earnestly desires the eternal happiness of all men, and does not wish

that any one should be lost, who can believe that He will not give them all the means, and even extraordinary ones, in a way known only to Himself, without which they could not work out their salvation, but must be lost forever? No! There is no doubt of it; even the most savage nations, hitherto unknown to the rest of the world, if there are such, have means enough to know their God, to love their God, to keep the law of their God, to attain to the light of the true faith, and thus, if they wish, to gain heaven.

How so? In what manner? No one is so stupid, so ignorant, and rude as not to know, when he sees a beautiful, well-built, magnificent house, that there must have been a master who built it. There is no one who hears from afar the delightful harmony of many voices and musical instruments, who does not think that there must be some one who is the author of that music. There is no one who sees a body move itself, walk, stand, speak, eat, drink, who does not know that such a body has a soul and life in it. Yet he has not seen the soul, the musician, or the architect with his bodily eyes, nor has any one told him about them. Thus we must hold it as certain that there is no man that has come to the use of reason, even if he were quite alone wandering about in a wilderness, who when he beholds the earth, the sky, and himself, does not arrive at the knowledge that there is a sovereign Lord and Master who has made this beautiful world, and governs it in its wonderful order and constant regularity, although he has not been told anything of this master; and this knowledge is enough with the sole light of reason to move and impel him to acknowledge that this sovereign Lord and Ruler should be honored, feared, and loved. Hence the question whether an inculpable ignorance of God is possible in a reasoning man is answered by nearly all theologians as follows: Such ignorance in one who has arrived at the use of reason cannot exist, at least for any length of time; for every one is brought to the knowledge of the Creator by the consideration of created things; and if the Supreme Being is not known by the name of God, yet He has some other title which inspires reverence, and suggests that obedience and submission are due to Him.

Besides this knowledge of God, and the obligation of honoring, loving, and praying to Him that is learned from creatures, reason itself teaches almost all the other commandments of God that are now prescribed, and how they should be kept. For just as the first principle of nature tells us that we must preserve our lives as long as we can, and every one, without further reasoning or teaching, at once understands and acknowledges that he must eat, drink, sleep, defend himself when attacked: so there is no reasoning being who does not at once recognize that first fundamental law impressed on us by nature itself: "Do unto others as you would wish them to do to you;" he knows that he must honor his parents, do no wrong to any one, inflict pain on no one without just cause, slay no one unless he is forced to do it, rob no one. And he who does any of those bad things, although he is quite alone and has no one on earth to fear, although he knows nothing of any express command, yet he will at once feel the biting tooth of remorse, and a secret fear that says to his heart he has done wrong; thus he knows he must avoid such actions. Hence there is no one ignorant of God and of His general law.

There are several wonderful mysteries that are far above our grasp; and yet they are in themselves infallibly true. For instance, we do not understand how it is that the sea ebbs and flows at different times, yet it is an undoubted fact that such is the case. We do not know and cannot see how and in what manner God speaks to the hearts of the wildest heathens, and gives them His light and copious graces, but we shall know all about it on that day when the Lord will disclose the most hidden things, and reveal before all men the secrets of hearts. Then we shall find that to be true which our Lord foretells: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (St. Matthew 8:11).

Then we shall see what St. John saw long ago, as we read in the Apocalypse: "A great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne" (Apoc. 7:9). Hence there is no nation in the world so wild and uncultivated that many of its people shall not gain heaven, and hence there is none that the good God does not richly provide with the means of salvation.

II. But if God wills the salvation of all men, why does He not give to all equally powerful means of salvation, that they may all save their souls with the same facility? It is certain, no matter how we consider the matter, that we Catholics have far more light and knowledge, and more convenient means and opportunities of doing good and gaining heaven easily, than those wild people who live in heathenism and infidelity, and Turks and heretics who do not live among Catholics. And even among Catholics it is again certain that God gives some more, others fewer graces, so that the former conquer their passions with ease, and the latter only with great difficulty, in order to gain heaven. Further, it is probable that if many who are now in hell had such great graces as many of the Saints received, they would also have become holy and be now in heaven; whence that

difference? “O man! Who art thou that repliest against God?” (Rom. 9:20) Poor mortal, how can you dare to scrutinize the hidden decrees of the Almighty, and to ask your God why He does this or that, and acts in this or that way, and not otherwise? Is it not enough for you that He has given you His graces and helps in abundance, so that, if you will, you can gain His eternal kingdom? What is it to you that He has given more or less to others? “Take what is thine and go thy way;” I do you no wrong; “or, is it not lawful for me to do what I will? Is thy eye evil because I am good?” (St. Matthew 20:14, 15.)

Let us imagine that a rich king publishes that whosoever comes to his palace on a certain day shall receive a thousand dollars, and he has fixed on a day to suit all, even those who live at the greatest distance. To some he sends a coach to convey them to his court, to others a horse, that they may ride thither; for others who live by the sea he sends boats, and for others who are strong enough he sends only a guide to show them the way. Now if those latter wished to complain and say: why must I walk while those others ride? I should also like to sit in a coach and thus travel more comfortably. Why must I weary myself journeying on foot? The king might say to him: Who asked you to come at all? I am so good as to offer you a thousand dollars that I do not owe you; if you do not want it, stay at home! But if I give others a more comfortable way of coming for the money, I do you no wrong, and show you no disfavor; it should suffice for you that you may have all that money, if you only wish to come and take it. There is what the King of heaven does with us. He calls and invites all men to his kingdom, there to possess a treasure of delights, if they only wish to come for it. Those who have received greater graces travel, as we imagine, in a coach to heaven; others, who have received fewer graces, as we believe-although we cannot be certain of that have greater difficulty in making the journey, and must go on foot. Supposing such to be the case, why has God so ordained? Why have some more graces than others? But that is not the question we should ask. We should rather inquire: Why do I not use the graces that the Lord has given me for my salvation?

Yet, to throw a little light on this matter, I say that this difference of graces is most justly ordained by God. Every creature is a copy of the divine perfections; but, as no one creature can in itself represent all those perfections, which are infinite, the wisdom of Providence has decreed that there should be a difference between creatures, so that the one may represent what the other does not. Among so many millions of men you will hardly find two who resemble each other in all respects; each one has something to distinguish him in color, face, or manner. Therefore God has appointed different states and modes of life for men; one must be rich, the other poor; one is married, the other single; one is a priest, another a man of the world, another a servant. And this distinction of classes is necessary for the preservation of the world. The same order must be observed in the distribution of graces and supernatural goods, which are dispensed in different ways according, to the states and conditions of men. The Religious has one grace, the layman another; the poor man has a different grace from the rich man; but all this is so admirably arranged that the grace given to each one is that which is best suited to His condition to enable him to work out his salvation with more ease. If I reject the grace given me by God, and refuse to make use of it for my salvation, although I can easily profit by it, then I cannot blame God, but He can blame me.

“Thou art just, oh, Lord, and thy judgment is right” (Ps. 118:137). No one can find fault with God, no one complain that He is parsimonious; all of us have graces and means enough, graces and means in abundance to work out our salvation. And woe to us if we Catholics do not come to God in heaven! What a hell will be ours! If even heathens and barbarians living in the remotest islands cannot with reason complain that they are abandoned by God and His grace, if they must ascribe their damnation to themselves alone: what excuse shall we have if we do not profit by the copious and frequent graces given for our salvation? Woe to us if many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while we, the children of the kingdom, are cast out into exterior darkness! If many heathens who have, with the sole light of reason, lived better according to God's commandments than we, shall be our judges and condemn us! This consideration should in future urge you to greater compunction of heart and detestation of your past sins, and to more zeal and constancy in the service of God; so that after having, at least during the remainder of your life, worked faithfully with God's graces and helps, at the end you may be able to think and say with St. Paul: “By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace in me hath not been void.” Amen.

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