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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

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Reason We Have for Being Grateful to God

"He fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks." St. Luke 17:16.

Ten lepers came to Jesus, begging of Him to heal them "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." "Go," said our merciful Lord to them, "show yourselves to the priests;" that is, offer the sacrifice prescribed for lepers. And while they were yet on the way, they were healed of their loathsome disease. "One of them, when he saw that he was made clean, went back, with a loud voice glorifying God, and he fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks. This Samaritan did not go on as he was told, to show himself to the priests. He forgot both temple and sacrifice in his eagerness to return and thank his Benefactor. And what is still more remarkable, Christ publicly praised him who thus came back, nor did He urge on him the necessity of offering the sacrifice commanded, but said to him, "Arise, go thy way; for thy faith hath made thee whole." Why was that? Because he had already made a sufficient offering in giving glory to God; it was not necessary for him to offer any other sacrifice, because gratitude is the most pleasing of all the gifts that can be offered to God. It is of this gratitude to God that I am now going to speak to you, and I say,

God deserves and expects from us mortals a constant, unceasing gratitude.

There is nothing that binds the hearts and minds of men closer together than benefits; and therefore the philosopher Aristotle says with reason: "He who receives a benefit finds fetters" for they chain his heart, as it were, and compel it by a sort of violence to be grateful to his benefactor. A natural instinct impels me to love him who does me good. Even the most savage animals are tamed by kindness, and allow themselves to be led about anywhere by those who are kind to them, while they show their gratitude by fawning on and caressing them. Experience teaches us daily of domestic animals, such as horses, oxen, cats, and especially dogs, with what wonderful fidelity and unwearied love they wait on man, their master, obey his behests in all things, no matter how difficult, and that, too, for the coarse and indifferent food they receive from him. How great the faithfulness, obedience, and submission of the dog to his master! Day and night he is ready at all times to defend him against robbers and murderers; and even when his master chastises him, he does not make any opposition, or show his teeth, but lies down at his feet and shows his willingness to obey in all things. Why? Because his master feeds him.

Lions, dragons, panthers, crocodiles, serpents are not a whit behind domestic animals in this way. It was a lion that astonished the whole city of Rome, when on one occasion a malefactor was sentenced to be thrown before him to be devoured. When the fierce animal saw the man, he lay down at his feet, licking them like a dog, and defended him against the other wild animals that ran up to attack him. What was the reason of this proceeding? Three years before, that same man had seen that lion in the desert suffering great pain from a thorn in his paw; he drew out the thorn and healed the wound. In the city of Carthage two fierce lions, that were tamed by kindness, used to follow Hanno through the streets like dogs. A panther once laid aside its natural ferocity and brought in safety through a forest beset with robbers a man who had lifted up its young out of a deep hole into which they had fallen. A terrible dragon once defended a man from the attacks of murderers and saved his life,

because it had been brought up with that man while both were still young. Many similar instances are on record of eagles, storks, and serpents. Even wild beasts are sensible of kindness, nor is there any animal so savage as not to be tamed by diligence and made to love its benefactor.

And yet, I wish to show reasoning beings, and they, too, Catholic Christians, that a benefactor deserves to be regarded with feelings of thankfulness. Truly, there cannot be the least doubt of that, nor is there any one who will not see at a glance that such is the case. Therefore I cannot sufficiently express my astonishment at the envious Scribes and Pharisees. "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, do you see that we prevail nothing? Behold, the whole world is gone after him" (John 12:19). They spoke thus because they saw with great amazement that crowds of people were following Christ everywhere, in town and country; see, they exclaimed, how the people are all running after Him. O senseless Pharisees! What are you wondering at? Have you not heard or seen how Christ acted towards the people? He "went about doing good and healing all" (Acts 10:38). Wherever He goes He does good; He fed the people miraculously in the desert; He healed the sick, made the blind to see, the lame to walk; He cleansed lepers, and freed those possessed by the devil; He comforted the sorrowful, raised the dead to life, and did good to all. And yet you are surprised that such a crowd of people should follow their Benefactor? Reason itself convinces us, and we all readily agree, that we owe gratitude and love to one from whom we have received benefits.

Who of us will refuse to acknowledge that we are surrounded, on all sides by the proofs of God's goodness? What we have been up to this, what we still are, and what we hope to be in eternity is all an effect of the perfect goodness of God. Whatever we have in or outside ourselves is nothing but a gift bestowed on us by God. Nothing but a gift, I say, and such a one as we cannot find amongst men on earth. We cannot find a purely unselfish generosity amongst men. It is God alone who does good at every moment through the most perfect generosity, seeking nothing else but to do us good. For what other motive could He have? He has nothing to expect from us; no evil to fear, no good to hope for. We must all say to Him with the prophet: "Thou art my God, for thou hast no need of my goods" (Ps. 15:2). Thou art not in need of my gifts, nor of my love, nor can I add to or take away from Thy infinite happiness.

If, then, nature prompts us to be grateful to a man who is kind to us, although his motive is not an unselfish one; nay, if we feel bound to make some return even to irrational animals, to a dog, for instance, for services they render us when we compel them to do so: how constant should not our gratitude be to the most generous God, who does good to us out of pure liberality! And the Lord expects that from us and has expected it at all times in the history of the world. In the very beginning, after He had created all things in six days, "He blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:3). Why so? That we might remember His goodness to us. Adam and Eve, our first parents, had been created the day before in paradise, so that, when they saw the various creatures that He had made for their use, they might hold a feast of thanksgiving to their bounteous Creator; therefore the Lord made the seventh day a holy one.

In the Old Law, whenever God bestowed some special benefit on His people, He always added a strict command to keep the anniversary of the day holy, and to celebrate it by a thanksgiving feast. Thus, even at the present day, the Jews, although their religion is no longer the true one, still keep up the old tradition of returning special thanks to God for having preserved their forefathers in life on the night when He slew all the first-born of the Egyptians. In the same way they celebrate the memory of their passing through the Red Sea, of their having been so wonderfully saved from their enemies, of their having been fed with bread from heaven. For the same reason they were commanded to keep in the Ark a piece of the manna, to remind them constantly of the gratitude they owed to God. Nay, all the sacrifices of the Old Law were intended for no other purpose but to excite the people to gratitude. Such, too; is the meaning of the third commandment Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Remember, what is the meaning of that? The word is not made use of in the other commandments. God does not say, remember to honor thy father and thy mother; remember that thou shalt not kill, or steal, or commit adultery. But He does say, Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Why? That we may understand that the keeping holy of the Sabbath day is not pleasing to God on account of abstaining from servile works, but chiefly on account of the grateful remembrance we should then have of the benefits conferred on us by him during the week. Remember! This is the thought we should foster every Sunday and holy day, instead of profaning those days with idly walking about, drinking, gambling and other amusements, as is unfortunately too often the case.

Now, if the Lord required such constant gratitude from His people in the Old Law, the law of fear and terror, what constant gratitude has He not reason to expect from His Christians, from His children under the New Law, the law of love, that holy and perfect law, which is filled with such extraordinary gifts and graces? Hear what the Apostle St. Paul says of this: "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Coloss. 3:17). And, again, to the Ephesians: "Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father" (Ephes. 5:20). And to the Thessalonians: "In all things give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you all" (I. Thess. 5:18). Mark how he says that we should always give thanks without ceasing; for God never ceases for a moment showering down His benefits on us. If a man does good to me, the benefit ceases when it is conferred, as far as he is concerned; it lasts no longer than the help rendered me, or the enjoyment of the gift presented to me. But God is constant in doing good to me, so that I can say with truth, not only that all I have and am comes from Him, and was given me by Him either in my creation or afterwards, but I must also acknowledge that the same good God continues to give me all I have and am every moment of my life; for every moment, in preserving my being, He, as it were, creates it anew. Now, if I should never forget a benefit conferred on me by a man, although many years may have passed since then, and the enjoyment of the benefit is at an end, truly, then I am much more bound to remember the goodness of God, who never ceases showering down benefits on me, and to whose generosity I owe every minute of my life. That is what the Apostle means by the words, "Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father."

The whole day we spend in the enjoyment of the divine benefits. Do we think even once with attentive minds of our Benefactor, and return Him due thanks? Yes, truly, when there is danger of some calamity, or temporal loss, or misfortune, or of the death of a dear child or friend, then, indeed, we can seek our God fairly; then we are ready to promise mountains of gold to prove our gratitude if He will only save us from the evil we dread. Nor is this wrong. But when the danger and dread of the evil are past, and we have obtained what we sought for from heaven, how do we act then? It is even a great thing if we acknowledge that the Lord God is our special benefactor. But where is our promise. Are we eager to show our constant thankfulness by being more zealous in the divine service, by loving God better, by more carefully avoiding the dangers and occasions of sin by shunning even deliberate venial sin? Ah, far from it. The remembrance of the divine generosity soon fades, and little or nothing of what we promised is fulfilled. We are importunate in asking, uneasy until we have received, and ungrateful afterwards.

A heathen, who was so dangerously ill that the physician despaired of his recovery, besought the god Jupiter to help him, promising that he would be ever grateful to him and sacrifice a hundred oxen as a thanks offering. One of his domestics, who knew that the poor man was not able to make such an offering, reproved him for making a promise he could not fulfill. Fool, said the sick man to him, what difference does that make? A promise costs nothing, and if by means of it I can recover my health, it will be well bestowed. Do you think that Jupiter will perhaps come down from his throne on Olympus to demand the fulfillment of my promise? I do not think so myself; I rather imagine he will not trouble himself about the matter. Such conduct in a blind heathen may be excused. But it is a deplorable fact that many Christians do not act better to the true God. During public calamities, or private misfortunes, oh, what beautiful promises are sent forth to heaven! What seemingly strong resolutions of amendment! What fervent determinations to love God in future! But the result shows that all these fine promises are like that of the heathen. You must know, however, that our God is not a god of wood or stone, who may be deceived by flattery and be cozened. To humble one's self before God, to speak to Him fairly, to adore Him and beseech Him under pressure of calamity, or when there is something of importance to be obtained from Him, that is neither love nor gratitude, but selfishness, and egotism.

True gratitude shows itself after the benefit has been received and consists in the constant recollection of and thanksgiving for the goodness of God, that never ceases. And ingratitude does not consist so much in not repaying a benefit, for that might be impossible to those whose poverty makes them unable to give anything; nor in the fact that one does not return unceasing thanks to his benefactor, for the absence of the latter might often render that also impossible; but the worst form of ingratitude is to forget the benefits received.

Let us not forget the benefits conferred on us by God, but always keep the recollection of them alive, that we may be thus urged to continual gratitude for them. Let us not allow wild animals even to surpass us in gratitude. Amen.

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