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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. 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

The Easy Means That We May Use to Increase Our Glory in Heaven.

“Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God.” St. Matthew 6:33.

Weighed down by incessant cares during your lives, you trouble yourselves only about what you shall have to eat and drink, and wherewith you shall be clothed, how you are to heap up wealth and riches, or to gain honor among men, or to secure your bodily comforts and gratify your senses. How vain is your labor! It has nothing to do with what we are sent on earth to seek. Quite different is the end that God had in view when He created us. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God;” it is an eternal gratification of body and soul, an eternal crown of honor, eternal joys and delights in the kingdom of God, that we should alone strive for with all our might; and this, too, we can if we are in the state of grace and wish to do so; this we can gain and increase, and in fact gain and increase with ease. Ah, where is our ambition? Where our desire for true joys if we take no care of this? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.” We can always add to our heavenly honor, wealth, and happiness in the kingdom of God. Let us now consider how wonderfully easy God has made this increase of merits, and consequently of eternal glory.

Wonderfully easy has God made the means of increasing sanctifying grace here, and eternal glory hereafter.

God does not require anything very great or extraordinary of us to gain heaven, but accepts our daily, and even in themselves trivial, acts as meritorious of glory. With what easy means He has supplied us to enable us to add to our eternal joys in heaven; for

1. In the first place, He reckons as meritorious of sanctifying grace, and consequently of everlasting glory, each and every good work we do, not merely those that are very perfect, but even the ordinary, in themselves trivial and even seemingly useless works we perform, provided only we are in the state of grace and do these works for God's sake with a good intention. Now, although all good works are not equally meritorious, but one merits more than another according as it is in itself more perfect, or difficult, or performed with greater zeal, yet even the least works have their value and merit for eternal life. What can be easier than to give a piece of bread to a hungry man, to give a drink of water to the thirsty, a rag of clothing to cover the naked? Yet all this is reckoned as meritorious, and according to the measure of the merit gained will be rewarded with endless treasures in heaven for all eternity; and our Judge, Jesus Christ Himself, tells us that it is for such things that He will call the just to His kingdom on the last day. What is more commonplace, or more seemingly useless, than eating, drinking, walking, standing, sitting, working? And yet if these things are done according to the

requirements of our state of life, in the grace of God, and to His honor and glory, according to the exhortation of the Apostle, they, too, will be considered meritorious of eternal glory.

2. We can see how easy God has made it for us to increase our eternal glory from the fact that our good works, according to the present disposition of Providence, merit nothing but an increase of sanctifying grace and of glory hereafter. Riches, honors, temporal prosperity, success in business, health, a long life, help and assistance in temptations and dangers of the soul, and that which is most important of all, and on which everything depends, the grace of final perseverance and a happy death: these are the goods that the Lord can and will bestow on us, but they are not goods with which our good works shall be rewarded; we may humbly pray for them, but we cannot merit them; they may be received as a free gift, but not claimed as a just recompense of merit. Why so? Are the good works we perform in the state of grace, and which are united with the merits of Jesus Christ, not worth so much as to merit those goods? Truly, they are worth it and much more. But God has determined to give them no other reward than the increase of grace here and glory hereafter; this exhausts all their merit, so that we may be able to make our eternal joys always greater and greater.

3. Thirdly, this is the very object God has in view in making the merit of our good works altogether our own property, so that it cannot be transferred to others, living or dead. He thus, as it were, places us in the same condition as little children who are under the care of a guardian, and who are indeed owners of their property, but with such limited rights that they cannot make away with any of it lawfully. It is nearly the same with the merit of our good works. I can, for instance, by my prayers, fasting, alms-deeds, Masses, acts of mortification, obtain some blessing from God for the soul or body of some other living person, but, no matter how willing I may be to do so, I cannot give him the merit of these good works; it is out of my power to assign that over to another; it is and remains my own property. And if I say a Mass for the souls in purgatory; if I give them, as many pious Christians do, all my good works, what do I do? I merely give away the satisfaction for the punishment due to sin, and by those very works that I thus give away I merit for myself the increase of sanctifying grace here and of eternal glory hereafter as my reward; this, although I might wish to give it away, or might imagine I have already given it, I cannot alienate from myself; it is a property, a fund that belongs to me alone as its lawful owner. "For," says the Apostle, "what things a man shall sow those also shall he reap" (Gal. 6:8), and no other can have any right or claim to that property.

4. Our good works continually increase in merit more and more, according to the measure of the increase and augmentation of sanctifying grace. For example: a child who has just come to the full use of reason has only the grace it received in Baptism, one single degree, let us call it. Now this child says the Lord's Prayer with devotion, and thereby merits a new degree of grace here and of glory hereafter, so that it actually possesses two degrees. If it again says the Lord's Prayer, it adds still more to its grace here and glory hereafter than it gained by the first recital. Why? Because the second prayer is said in a state of greater sanctifying grace than the first, and thus it comes from a soul that is more pleasing to God. The third prayer is still more meritorious than the second and first, the fourth than the third, and so the merit of good works goes on increasing more and more till death, in proportion to the increase of grace.

5. God is not satisfied with the mere merits that we can gain by our own work and labor, that is, by our own good works; for in the institution of the holy Sacraments He has opened to us an inexhaustible living fountain of graces and merits that are given to our souls in the reception of those Sacraments, immediately through the merits of Jesus Christ, or as theologians say, "ex opere operato," and that are rewarded hereafter with eternal glory. Thus, for instance, if I am in the state of grace, and confess my sins again with true sorrow and contrition, and am again absolved from them, I merit a new degree of sanctifying grace and heavenly glory, not merely on account of my contrition and humble confession, but also through the virtue of the Sacrament, which immediately through the merits of Christ, without any work of mine so far, confers new merit on me. Of all the other Sacraments the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar has most power in this respect when one receives it worthily; partly because its proper effect is to increase sanctifying grace in the soul, partly because Jesus Christ, who comes to us, God and Man, as our Guest, for our good, acts on the occasion like a wealthy prince who, as befits his high personality, gives away not copper money, but gold and silver, and that, too, with the utmost liberality; and that we may all the more easily enjoy His generosity He has made this Sacrament the easiest of all to be received, penance alone excepted. Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders can be received validly but once in a lifetime, and Extreme Unction but once during the same dangerous illness; Matrimony can be received

but once, except one of the married couple dies. But the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar and Penance can be repeated and received as often as we wish, every month, every week, nay, frequently during the week. What else can be the object of such a beautiful invention of the divine generosity if not to entice us to receive that Sacrament often, that we may thus drink more deeply at the living fountain of grace, enrich our souls more and more with merit, and make our future glory in heaven greater and greater?

6. Sixthly, what should be a source of great consolation for us, God has ordained that the merits which we have accumulated by our good works during life, or that have been granted us out of the treasure of Christ in the reception of the Sacraments, can never be lessened in the least by any venial sin or imperfection or fault whatever. Venial sin is an offence against God and deserves temporal punishment, but it does not take away sanctifying grace either in part or altogether, even if our small sins surpassed in number the sands on the seashore. All the sanctifying grace that we have once collected and accumulated belongs to us always, as long as we do not make God our enemy by committing mortal sin; and hence it still preserves its right, according to its measure and degree, to the eternal joys of heaven. The accounts between God and us are not regulated as they are between men; in the latter case the receipt is compared with the expenditure, the debt with the payment; thus, for instance, I have lent you twenty dollars, and you owe me twenty dollars. On the other hand, I have on a certain occasion received goods from you to the amount of ten dollars, so that that sum has to be deducted from your debt, and you owe me only ten. Again, you have in my name given six dollars to Peter; thus your debt is lessened again, and you owe me only four, and so on. This, I say, is not the way in which God reckons with us: He keeps two different books; in one He writes down the merits of our good works, for which He has bound himself to give us heaven as a reward; in the other He writes down our daily faults and venial sins, as well as the mortal sins we have repented of, for which we deserve some punishment. Neither of these books has anything to do with the other. God does not say: you have done so many good works, and therefore I owe you such and such a reward in heaven; but you have often offended me by venial sin, and you have not yet satisfied for the mortal sins you have blotted out by repentance, so I shall strike out some of your merit and only give you so much. No, that is not the way; otherwise what would become of us poor mortals? And how would we fare in the summing up of accounts, with the repeated sins and shortcomings that we are guilty of day by day? How could our sanctifying grace ever increase if it were constantly lessened? And what sort of a reward could we expect in heaven? No; He assures to us forever the whole capital of grace and merit, so that we can never lose any of it. What a consolation this should be for us! I have to spend a thousand years, and even several thousand, if the world lasts so long, in purgatory, and to burn there till the end of the world on account of my sins and to pay my debts, I am still certain and assured that my glory in heaven is kept for me quite intact, and that I shall receive it without the least diminution according to what I have merited by my good works on earth.

Mortal sin is the only thing that robs us altogether of all our treasure of grace and merit. But even here the goodness and generosity of God have found another means of promoting our interests. How so? In this way: when a man consents to mortal sin the book in which his merits are written out is, as it were, thrown down under the desk and forgotten; the Lord God looks on that man now as an enemy, and if he dies in that state he cannot expect the least reward for all his merits throughout eternity; he is just as badly off as if he had never done a good act in his life. But when he makes a good confession or an act of perfect contrition, and thus recovers the grace and friendship of God, the book of his merits is again taken up; it still contains the record of all he gained before falling into sin, and he receives it all back again in addition to the new merit he has gained by his perfect contrition or repentance; and his subsequent good works are as meritorious as the grace he had before his fall would have made them; nay, on account of the increase of grace gained by repentance, those works are more meritorious than any similar works he did before. We cannot speak in the same way of sin; for when it is once forgiven it does not revive again, nor is it again imputed to the sinner who relapses into grievous guilt; because God's generosity surpasses His severity, and He seeks our greater glory, but not our greater punishment. Oh, what a comfort for those who have often sinned grievously, and have truly repented and made a good confession.

7. The desire that God has to exalt us in heaven is evident from the lengthening of our lives. One man He keeps alive for twenty, another for thirty, a third for forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety years; and what is the reason of that? If He merely wished us to gain heaven as a reward, would not a short time suffice? I may, if I am in the state of grace, gain everlasting happiness by a single fervent sigh, by one act of charity. And the little

infant who dies immediately after having received Baptism has an assured claim to heaven. So it is; an hour, a quarter of an hour, nay, a minute is more than enough for any one to gain heaven. Why, then, does God prolong our lives for such a lengthened period? Here again we have another invention of the divine goodness in our regard! God is not satisfied with merely having us in heaven; He wishes us to mount higher and higher, in order to enjoy ourselves all the more with Himself forever.

8. While thus preserving our lives, how does God not constantly urge us to increase our merit and glory by diligently performing good works? That misfortune, sickness, poverty, death, trouble, and adversity: what else is it but a check to keep us from vice, a spur to urge us on to the fulfillment of the divine will, to humility, to penance, to prayer, and other virtuous and meritorious works? The very temptations that we suffer from the devil, by which that evil spirit seeks our ruin, are permitted by God and ordained by Him, as the Apostle says, for our greater good and profit: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). He allows us to be tempted in order to purify our virtue, to prove our love and fidelity toward Him, and to earn for ourselves a crown greater in proportion to the trouble we have in bravely overcoming our enemy. And besides all this, how earnestly He exhorts us to do good! He tells us not to be careful about the transitory things of earth, but to devote our whole attention to the eternal riches of heaven: "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). We must not allow the talents and gifts of nature and grace that have been entrusted to us to lie idle, but rather make an advantageous use of them until the time of His coming: "Trade till I come" (St. Luke 19:13).

If God had given to us mortals the choice of a state of life when we come to the use of reason, who would content himself with the condition of a poor peasant when he could have that of a rich lord, or prince, or king? Now the freedom that is not allowed us in this miserable world God has reserved for us in heaven, where the highest position of immortal glory may be ours if we choose. There we can, if we wish, be princes, kings in glory and happiness; nay, the Almighty invites us to choose a high place. And shall we, through sheer laziness, refuse to accept what He offers us? Let us, with the help of God's grace, in future endeavor with all earnestness to reach the place in heaven He has prepared for us. Let us be sorry for the beautiful time of our past life that we have so uselessly squandered without merit, for the many opportunities of gaining glory that we have neglected, for the many grievous sins by which we have completely forfeited all claim to heaven. Let us now begin to repair these losses with greater zeal, redouble our daily good works, have a pure intention in all our actions, and labor till the end of our lives to ascend higher in heaven, that, oh, Lord, since such is Thy wish, our greater joy and glory may also increase Thy honor and glory for all eternity. Amen.

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