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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

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FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Circumstances of Restitution

“He gave him to his Mother.” St. Luke 7:15.

Why did Christ give back the young man to his mother, after having restored him to life? Did he still belong to his mother? No; once death has intervened, although one is restored to life by a miracle, all the bonds are loosed which during life connect men with each other, whether they arise from natural ties, or from mutual agreement. Thus, if today a husband dies, and tomorrow is restored to life again, his former marriage is annulled, and both husband and wife are freed from all obligations toward each other. Still, if a child restored to life should belong to any one, there is no doubt that it is to his mother. Therefore: “He gave him to his mother.” After this digression I return to the matter I have already spoken of. I have said and proved that it is indispensably necessary to make restitution in order to avoid eternal damnation, so that inability alone can excuse one from making it. But there is still one point, and that is the manner and circumstances of restitution.

- I. *Who must make restitution?*
- II. *To whom must it be made?*
- III. *What must be restored?*
- IV. *When must it be restored?*

I. Who must make restitution? That obligation rests on those who take, keep, or in any way injure what belongs to others. Would to God that all who know of this obligation would fulfill it when it concerns them, according to their knowledge! How many injustices are being committed daily! How seldom do we hear of restitution being duly made for them! Men are most eager to take the property of others, but very sluggish about restoring it. Restitution is generally made by such people as poor servants, or workmen who have taken a few shillings from their employers; when they hear injustice spoken of their conscience at once begins to annoy them, and they try in their poverty to find the means of giving back secretly what they have stolen, or of making good any injury they have done others; and if they have no other means, they try to make up for the theft by increased diligence in their work. But what of the great thieves who commit gross injustices, who steal by hundreds and thousands in their offices or business dealings? Do they come back and make restitution? No, it is not easy to find people of that kind who are willing to make restitution, although they are bound to do so.

Besides, we must not forget that not only the people themselves who have taken, kept, or injured the property of others, but also their children, heirs and all who share in the unjust gain, are under the same obligation, if the

former do not make restitution, and the latter are aware of the injustice committed. Yet, many a one thinks to himself, what is it to me if my ancestors, or others from whom I have received anything, have acquired unjustly what they have given me? Let them look to it; it is their own affair; I have not stolen; I have taken in good faith what they have given me; how could I prevent them from doing wrong? No, that will not do; what is unjustly gained always cries out for its lawful owner: "Pay what thou owest." Even if I buy a thing with my own money, and hear that it is stolen, I must give it back and suffer the loss. The sin of injustice is the only one that binds the children and descendants of the guilty man to atonement. "As I live, saith the Lord God, this parable shall be no more to you a proverb in Israel. Behold all souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, the same shall die" (Ezech. 18:3, 4), and no others on account of it. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and the father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the justice of the just shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezech. 18:26). Therefore, if the father is wicked, he alone has to bear the penalty. If the son is pious, all the better for himself. But in the matter of restitution the proverb is quite true: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the children are set on edge." The children share in the sin of their parents if they do not restore the unjustly acquired property left them by their parents.

From this parents can see how foolishly they act when they try to enrich their children by dishonest means. They think that it is out of parental love and tenderness they are acting when they endeavor to leave them a rich legacy, while in reality they could not do a worse thing for them than to leave them what they have made dishonestly. If they were determined, against the law of nature, to make their children miserable in time and eternity, they could not better carry out their cruel purpose than by making them heirs of their unjust gains; for in that way they lay them under an obligation so grievous and so troublesome that it is very likely that they will never fulfill it properly.

II. To whom must restitution be made? To him who is the owner of the stolen or injured property. Many men make a grievous mistake in this matter; they think they will satisfy their consciences and fulfill their obligation by giving the stolen money to the poor, or to the church, or by having Masses said for it. If you do not know, and, after diligent inquiry, cannot find out the person you have stolen from or injured, then it is enough for you to give the stolen money to the poor, or to get Masses said for it; but you must devote to this purpose not merely a part, but the whole of the money in question, and that you are bound to do in those circumstances under pain of sin. But if you can find out the lawful owner, neither alms nor Masses will suffice, nor an offering to the church; the rightful owner must have what belongs to him. It is a work of Christian charity to give alms, but they must be given from one's own, and not from what belongs to other people. The poor man to whom you give an alms rejoices and prays for you, but the man whom you have wronged cries out to heaven for vengeance on you; which of these two will God hear? When you give alms it is to Jesus Christ himself you give them; but you rob Jesus Christ in the person of your neighbor to whom you have acted dishonestly. Tell me, would you be satisfied if a man were to take your money from you and give it to the poor? No, you would say; if I want to give alms I can do so myself.

I. It is cruel not to help the hungry and naked when one can, but it is still greater cruelty to throw them stinking carrion, in the shape of other people's money. If the poor are good Christians they must protest against it and cry out with St. Ambrose: "Do not feed us with the blood of our brethren." The pelican feeds its young with blood; it tears open its own breast in order to give its blood to its young; but the eagle gives to its young the flesh and blood of other birds and beasts. If you feed the poor, you must do it like the pelican, and not like the eagle. The elder Tobias said to his son: "Give alms out of thy substance" (Tob. 4:7): do not give them out of what belongs to others. Christ has said: give alms, and not avarice; what is given out of the property of others is no alms, although it be given to the needy. If you have stolen only one dollar, and give a thousand dollars in alms, still you have not restored the dollar.

2. You say: I will have Masses said for it. Fine Masses they will be! A nice sacrifice that, which you offer to God with other people's money! You wish to have Masses said, and to bedew the altar of the Lord with the tears of the poor whom you have deceived and wronged; must not the Most High reject such a sacrifice with disgust? Certainly, for, according to the Wise Man: "The victims of the wicked are abominable to the Lord" (Prov. 15: 8), because they come from injustice. Stolen incense is not accepted in heaven; the sighs of the poor find a

hearing before the prayers of the priest. God looks upon such a sacrifice as an abomination, not certainly in itself, for the holy Mass is a most pleasing sacrifice in the eyes of God, but because it is offered with money unjustly gained and with the blood of the poor. "If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee;" I say, if you remember that you owe your brother anything: "leave there thy gift before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother." I say: go and give your neighbor what belongs to him, "and then come and offer thy gift." Then, if you wish, you may have Masses said.

I will give the money to the church, thinks a third; I will keep a lamp burning constantly, or will have an altar put up. And what good will it do you to give to the church the money that belongs to other people? That is a present like the one Judas offered when he threw down in the temple the thirty pieces of silver, the blood-money for which he sold our Lord; a present that deserves the answer that St. Peter gave to Simon the magician, when the latter wished to purchase from him the power of giving the Holy Ghost: "Keep thy money to thyself to perish with thee" (Acts 8:20). Away with your gift! Restore what does not belong to you. But to whom? To its rightful owner, and to no one else. Give back the money you made by charging unjust interest in times of scarcity; give back to your workmen the wages you still owe them; make restitution to those whom you have defrauded of their rights. Give it all back, but to no one except its lawful owner; and if he is no longer alive, give it to his heirs or to his children. But if none of these can be found, then you can and must give it to the poor, not as a charitable alms, but as a debt that you are obliged to pay under pain of sin.

III. What must be restored? We must restore whatever we have taken, kept, or injured. There can be no doubt of that; but we must not forget that all has to be restored, when possible; it will not do to give back the half or any other part only. How rarely are instances found of such exact restitution. Besides, not only must restitution be made for what one has unjustly taken, kept, or injured, but also all the harm suffered by the lawful owner on account of being deprived of his property must be made good. For instance: I have stolen a hundred dollars, and kept them for ten years; at last my conscience begins to trouble me, and I make restitution through my confessor, Thanks be to goodness, then, that I am relieved of that load. But wait, the load is not quite got rid of yet! But how is that? I have given back the hundred dollars I stole! Quite so; but you must remember that the owner of that money could have made profit with it during those ten years he had it. So that that profit has to be restored to him, although the money has been lying idle all the time in the possession of the thief; for the latter is the cause of the loss that the owner suffered by not being able to make his legitimate profit. Nay, if the owner were unable to carry on his business for the want of the hundred dollars I have stolen, so that he has become poor, I am bound to reinstate him. So that I shall have made a fine profit by my theft! And it is a not infrequent consequence of unjust gain that the stolen thing has to be restored two, three or four times over before one's sin can be forgiven. We have an example of this again in Zaccheus, who promised to restore fourfold any wrong he had inflicted on others; that is, he was ready not only to give back what he had taken unjustly, but also to make good all the loss caused by his act.

IV. Finally, when is restitution to be made? The answer is: As soon as possible, so that no unnecessary delay is allowed. He who commits a theft has the guilt of it on his soul as long as he defers making restitution, when it is in his power to make it; nay, the sin is renewed as often as he remembers that he has what belongs to another, and renews his determination not to restore it yet. This teaching is based on the natural law, of justice, which forbids us to wrong any one. For he whom I have stolen from has always the right to his property, a right that I violate as long as I am determined to keep his property against his will; and, as I do him wrong by stealing from him, so also I wrong him by unjustly hindering him from using what is his own; but that I do every day and hour that I put off restitution, when it is in my power to make it. This holds good also for all those who borrow money and, without just cause, defer repaying it beyond the time appointed. When they wish to borrow money they bow and scrape in the most humble manner, and are full of honied words and promises: "Till they receive, they kiss the hands of the lender, and in promises they humble their voice; but when they should repay, they will ask time" (Ecclus. 29:5, 6). And if the creditor presses for his money, "they will return tedious and murmuring words and will complain of the time. And if he be able to pay, he will stand off" (Ibid. 6:7). Finally, after long waiting, the unfortunate creditor, instead of getting his money, is put off with abuse and hard words. 'He will

defraud him of his money, and he shall get him for an enemy without cause; and he will pay him with reproaches and curses, and instead of honor and good turn will repay him injuries” (Ibid. 8:9). If this is right and just, what will be reckoned as an injustice?

I will make restitution, many a one thinks, but not yet. And when will you do it? Some other time. Why not now, since it is in your power? It is evident that you are not willing to be converted and to return to God, and to leave off sinning. I will make restitution when I am dying; I will put it in my will. When you are dying? That is a fine penance, indeed, that you put off to your deathbed! You will restore on your deathbed what you can no longer possess, and which leaves you, instead of you leaving it. A restitution of that kind is like throwing goods overboard out of a ship in a storm, in order to prevent her from sinking. From what motive will you act? Hardly from love of God and of justice, but because you cannot help yourself and because you are afraid of death. I will leave it in my will. But suppose you die without making a will, what is to become of your soul? If your will is already made, but your children and heirs defer restitution, like yourself, what will become of your soul? Why do you put it off? Pay what thou owest, and at once.

In order to avoid all this trouble, let us never seek to make any unjust gain. Better is it to have only a little, better to have nothing at all, with God as our friend, and a quiet conscience, than to have much money - nay, all the treasures of the world - with God as our enemy, and an uneasy conscience. Better be poor and honest than rich and dishonest. “Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you” (St. Matthew 6:33). Amen.

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