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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 +++

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

To Find Fault with, and to Interpret in a Bad Sense, the Actions of Others Is a Great Injustice

“They watched him.” Luke 14:1.

The Pharisees, being filled with hatred and envy of our Lord, kept a close watch on everything he did. They desired to see or to hear something from him which they could have found fault with, so as to make him odious to the people. For this reason alone “they watched him.” How many critical observers of the same kind can be counted in our days, who examine, watch, and pry into the actions of others, put a wrong interpretation on and criticize them, make them the subject of rash judgments and groundless suspicions, and thus talk of and condemn their faults and failings! A vice which, alas! Is very common among all classes of people, and is especially

Opposed to the charity we owe our neighbor, whether that meddling on our part arise from malice or from imprudence.

1. Everything that comes from passion is opposed to fraternal charity; for we can easily imagine that, when we have a bitter feeling toward another, we are not likely to think or speak well of him when he is made the subject of conversation. Anything that we hear, see, or suspect him of to his discredit we cannot keep secret; we must speak of it at the first opportunity, and we are more inclined to exaggerate than to lessen it. We say: “do you know what happened lately? Such and such a one acted most shamefully; his villainy has been discovered; I cannot trust him any longer; I thought that man knew better; he pretended to be very clever, but now he has made a grievous blunder.” But they who thus give way to hatred of their neighbor are not always willing to make known their feelings; much less do they wish to incur the blame of trying to injure another’s character, and therefore they endeavor to conceal their motive as well as they can. It is a well-known fact, they say, otherwise I would not mention it; I am sorry for the poor man; it is a great pity he has such a fault. Oh, hypocrite! Are you really sorry for him? If so, why do you not try to conceal his faults, that he may at least have a chance of retaining the esteem of others? Why do you bring further disgrace on him by relating his faults? It is a well-known fact; otherwise I would not mention it! If it is so well-known, then what is the use of your saying anything about it? You are merely wasting your words. Suppose I said to you: “Two and two make four; today is Sunday; these are well-known facts, otherwise I would not mention them;” would you not think me mad? We know these facts already, you would say; there is no necessity for you to repeat them to us; tell us something

that we do not know. It is a well-known fact; otherwise I would not mention it! To whom is it known? To yourself, and not to others? Then you are evidently guilty of injuring your neighbor's character; you act against the right he has to his good name, and you are alone to blame for making known his faults. If his faults are known to many in the town, but not to those to whom you speak of them, you still cannot be excused from a breach of charity, since you spread still further what is disadvantageous to his good name. If Christian charity and not ill-feeling prompted you to speak, you would find in the same person many good qualities that redound to his praise; but as it is, you say not a word about them. You are like a spider; you seek the poison, and leave the honey behind, because your heart is full of ill-will against your neighbor.

2. There is still a worse consequence of that fault-finding and criticizing when it comes from hatred and envy; for not only are the faults and failings of another noticed and talked of, but even his good qualities are misinterpreted; because, when the heart is once filled with hatred of another, it is very hard to look with a favorable eye at anything he does. The envious Pharisees were not satisfied with criticizing what they imagined to be faulty in Christ and his disciples; they found fault even with what they should have praised and approved of. Such is the complaint our Lord makes in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say: he hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say: Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:18, 19). If I drive out devils, they say I do it in the name of Beelzebub, the prince of devils; if I heal the sick and teach the people, they cry me down as a disturber and a raiser of sedition. Such Pharisees are still to be found in great numbers amongst Christians. If one whom they do not love is really humble of heart, they call him a hypocrite; if he is patient and a lover of peace, he is looked on as a coward; if he frequents respectable company, he is accused of being fond of the pleasures of the table; if he avoids company, he is called a misanthropist; if he does his duty without any regard to human respect, he is looked on as an unmannerly boor; if he is friendly and polite to every one, he is considered a flatterer and a deceiver. This hatred and ill-will finds something sinful and faulty even in virtues, and when a man forms a judgment of that kind, of course it comes out in conversation with others.

Nay, what adds to the malice and injustice of these hostile criticisms is that when nothing in a person's outward life and actions can be found fault with, his secret thoughts and intentions, although known only to God and himself, are made the object of attack, and bad motives are imputed to him; his words and actions and behavior are carefully studied, in order to find in them some proof that his intentions are bad. Thus they say: that priest goes so often to that house and visits such and such a person, he cannot mean anything good by it; that woman, that girl is always well dressed when she appears in church, she can hardly come for devotion's sake alone; she never paid for that dress out of her own pocket; I have seen those two talking together for a long time, and could see by their manner how they are affected toward each other; did you not notice what a face so and so made? I can easily guess what he is thinking of; did you hear what he said, on that occasion? I know what he means well enough. Do not people very often talk in the manner spoken of by St. James in his Epistle, although in a different sense: "Do you not judge within yourselves, and are become judges of unjust thoughts?" (James 2:4.)

3. How do you know that what you say of that person is true? I have seen, or heard it, you answer. And that is generally the only foundation of the criticism: I have seen, or heard it! That is the judgment-seat before which the virtues are summoned to receive their sentence. Has not God given us to understand clearly enough that we must not trust such treacherous witnesses as our eyes and ears? "He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears" (Is. 11:3). how many there are whom these senses deceive! "I have seen it!" What have you seen? "What that man did, where he went, how he behaved." And is that all? Have you seen his heart? Have you seen the intention he had in acting as he did, in going to that place, in behaving in that way? For it is certain that the goodness or malice of an outward act depend principally on the intention one has when performing it. "For what man," asks St. Paul, "knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11.) If you were to see a young woman, splendidly dressed, going through a hostile camp to the tent of a general whose licentiousness is well known, and spending the night in it, what would you think? Oh, certainly, you would say, she has lost her virtue, and is a bad woman. And yet that was done in the Old Law by one of the most chaste of women, Judith, whose purity was untarnished.

“I have heard it.” Indeed? And must it be true therefore? If we are to take all we hear as Gospel, there will be no lies in the world any longer. If everything people say is true, hardly any one will have a good character, and we must look on Susanna and Joseph as guilty of adultery, and our Lord himself as a drinker of wine, a disturber of the people, a blasphemer, and a deceiver. Susanna was accused on oath by the two elders, and all the people believed the accusation, and were about to stone her; Joseph was accused by the wife of Putiphar, and was cast into prison; Christ himself was publicly accused by the high-priest, the scribes, and nearly all the Jewish people, and was condemned to death and nailed to the Cross; yet all these accusations were wicked calumnies. How often have you not been deceived by reports you have heard, so that you have afterwards found to be false what you at first believed? How often do not people interpret a thing in a wrong sense, either because they do not understand what is said, or because some important word has escaped their ears? How often does it not happen that an exaggerated or an imperfect report of a thing makes it look quite different from what it really is?

4. Supposing even that what you say is literally true, and that many are already aware of it, nay, more, supposing that no harm is done to any one by your talking of it, yet you can hardly avoid violating Christian charity even then. For you act in direct opposition to the rule of charity: “do unto others as you wish them to do unto you.” Consider the matter fairly, and acknowledge the truth to your own conscience; would you be satisfied if others spoke of you in that way? If you were painted in such black colors; would you like other people, to whom you are not at all answerable, to pry into your concerns, to watch all your actions, to keep a list of the persons with whom you associate, the places you visit, the conversations you hold, to interpret your behavior, your faults and failings according to their own ideas, and to make sport of them with others, to laugh at and ridicule them? Even if your faults are known to many, would you like to have them frequently spoken of, so as to keep them fresh in people’s memories? But if you do not wish that to be done to you, you must be careful not to do it to others.

5. “Judge not, that you may not be judged; for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:1, 2) If you wish to give your neighbor his due, and to practice the charity you owe him; if you wish to be friends and followers of Jesus Christ; if you wish to stand well with God at the judgment-seat, then you must never judge ill of another, and much less say anything to his detriment. Do not meddle with the affairs of others. If curiosity should prompt you to inquire what this or that person has said or done, if the slippery tongue is on the point of criticizing others, restrain it, reprove it in the words in which Christ reprov’d Peter when the latter was too anxious to find out what was to become of John: “What is it to thee? Follow me.” What hast thou to do with the faults of others? Art thou created for no other purpose but to criticize them? Look after yourself and your own soul; that is all that God requires of you. Thus you should criticize your own actions, and see whether they are good or bad, praiseworthy or reprehensible. According to the beautiful exhortation of St. Paul: “Let every one prove his own work, and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another” (Gal. 6:4, 5); that is a matter that concerns us all, but we have nothing to do with the actions of others, for whom we are not responsible to God. “For every one shall bear his own burden;” every one will have to give an account of his own works, and according to them he shall be either punished or rewarded.

Let us act like the Apostles at the Last Supper, when Christ told them that one of them was about to betray him. “And they, being very much troubled, began to say: Is it I, Lord?” (Matt. 26:22.) Not one asked, is it my neighbor? Is it Peter, Andrew, or Judas? But each one was afraid that he himself might be the unhappy traitor. “Is it I, Lord?” Oh, if every one were to attend to himself and to his own faults and sins, how much would he not find to blame and condemn! He would soon see that he is like a traveler who is carrying a bag on his back, and who can see only what is before him, but not the load of sins he himself is carrying. You know how Christ acted when the Pharisees brought before him the woman taken in adultery, and said to him that she should be stoned: “Jesus, bowing himself down, wrote with his finger on the ground” (John 8:6); that is, he wrote on the ground their secret sins. “When, therefore, they continued asking him, he lifted himself up and said to them: he that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). How astonished they must have been when they heard of this! They slunk away one after the other, like thieves caught in the act; not one of them dared to cast a stone at the guilty woman. Oh, if that same finger were to write down the sins and daily faults of

each one of us, so that we could see them, then indeed we should be silent about others, and not be so ready to find fault with and to cast stones at our neighbor; we should then leave him in peace, and try to rectify our own misdeeds!

6. If you sometimes hear talk of that kind in company, act as if you did not know what the talk is about; for if you listen to it, and show that you take pleasure in it, you co-operate in the sin and in the injury done to charity. Therefore, if you have any authority over those who are finding fault with their neighbor, you must exercise it, and say to them with a holy zeal: What is that to you? If they are not subject to you, although they are your inferiors, you must modestly say to them: What is that to me? I know nothing about the matter, nor do I concern myself with the affairs of other people; or else you may say: If you wish to praise another in my hearing, I will listen to you; but I have no ears for fault-finding.

Finally, you who are exposed to the criticisms and fault-finding of others, be not disturbed at it; let people think and say of you what they please; if you are guilty of what they accuse you, humble yourselves, acknowledge that you deserve to be found fault with, and resolve to amend. If you give reasonable grounds for suspicion or for unfavorable judgments of your conduct, you are bound in conscience to remove that stumbling block out of the way of others. If you are innocent, then be comforted! You are not the only one; you have countless companions who must bear patiently similar criticisms of their conduct; the saint who is free from them has yet to be born. Continue, then, to live as true Christians; say confidently with St. Paul: "But to me it is a very small thing to be judged by you," or by any other man's day; it does not trouble or concern me in the least that men should condemn me; I seek not their favor, nor do I fear their displeasure; "but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3, 4). He can see into my heart, of which men know nothing; they may now condemn my actions behind my back, but by and by they will not be my judges; there is One who will judge me, and he will judge them, too, and their talk. To him I appeal; to him I entrust my cause; if he does not speak against me, then my affairs are prospering, even if the whole world were to look on me as the greatest malefactor. Amen.

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