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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 two = The Penitent Christian

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Advantage of a General Confession

“Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.” St. Matthew 22:37

We cannot truly love God unless we banish sin from our hearts by true repentance and a thorough amendment of life. But alas! How many there are whose penance is only a sham. Whose past confessions have been either invalid or gravely defective! If any one of you has reasonable fears that such has been his or her case, then, there is no better, more useful, or more necessary means to adopt than to make a general confession, either of the whole life, or, at least, of the time that has elapsed since his or her last general confession; for

I. *A general confession cleanses the soul from all sin and hence*

II. *A general confession is necessary to some souls, and very useful to many.*

I. In order to be a valid confession and absolution, there must be, on the penitent's part, diligent examination of conscience, supernatural sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment and, finally, a humble and candid confession of all grievous sins. If any of these requisites be wanting, the Sacrament of Penance will not avail him to forgiveness. He still remains in the state of sin. On the other hand, the better and more perfectly those points are observed, the more will the soul be cleansed, and the greater the graces received in the Sacrament. And those points are never better, more fully, or more earnestly observed than in a general confession.

1. The examination of conscience is then made with far more care and diligence than in one's ordinary preparation for confession. For when one is preparing for a general confession of his whole life, or of a considerable portion of it, he examines most closely everything that has even the appearance of a sin, so as not to leave out anything that could afterwards make him uneasy. And he is helped in this by a special grace of God, who is wont to assist, by an extraordinary light, the man of good will, who is in earnest about being converted to him with his whole heart.

2. After such a careful examen of conscience, his sorrow for sin is far greater than in his usual confessions, because he has arrived at a clearer knowledge of his misery, his poverty, and the woeful abuse he has made of his time. From the knowledge you thus gain by the examination of your whole life, there will arise in you a salutary confusion and a bitter sorrow of heart. You will be filled with shame at the sight of your sins, and with wonder at the infinite mercy of God, who has borne with you so patiently and so long, in spite of your manifold offences. O my God (you will say), I must now acknowledge that my eyes and ears, tongue and hands, and whole body, along with my imagination, memory, understanding, heart, and will, and everything that is in me,

have been so many instruments that I have misused to offend thee, my God, who art deserving of all love. Alas, what is to become of me? If one sin is enough to deprive me of heaven and its eternal joys, and to condemn me to the everlasting torments of hell, what sort of a hell have I deserved by the countless sins that now stare me in the face? If thou hast hurled into the depths of hell, from the heights of heaven, millions of the noblest and most beautiful creatures, for a single momentary sinful thought; if, for one sin of disobedience, thou hast turned my first parents out of paradise, and hast, moreover, made the whole world a valley of tears, and afflicted its inhabitants with so many miseries; if there are many souls now in hell who have offended thee by but one mortal sin in their whole life, what sort of punishment must I expect, unless I truly repent? How can I sufficiently praise thy infinite goodness and mercy for not having long since cast me off as I deserved, and for so willingly pardoning me, after having so often and so grievously offended thee? What can follow from such considerations as these, but sincere sorrow of heart, a thorough detestation and hatred of all sin, and an earnest, zealous love for such a good God?

Oh, how many sins lie hidden in a conscience that is normally in a troubled and disorderly state! Certainly, some of us confess our sins from time to time, but many still remain concealed in the depths which are not brought to light as they should be. The examen of conscience, the sorrow for sin, the purpose of amendment, the candid declaration of our sins, and everything that is required for the purifying of the soul in the holy Sacrament of Penance, is best and most perfectly performed in a general confession.

How many confessions are invalid through some great defect in one of those necessary dispositions! Some are careless in their examen of conscience, even when they have committed mortal sin; or, through culpable ignorance, being in doubt about the malice of certain grievous transgressions, they do not confess them; or they content themselves with reading an act of contrition out of their prayer-books, without having a real supernatural sorrow for sin. In many, the purpose of amendment is not what it should be, since they still remain attached to their old vices, or do not make the necessary restitution, or remain in the proximate occasion of sin, or do not lay aside their hatred against their neighbor, or continue to give scandal and occasion of sin to others, or do not fulfill the duties of their state as they ought to. Of what nature are often the confessions of young people, who frequently commit grievous sin in thought, word, and deed, and yet have not a clear idea of what is meant by supernatural sorrow, a firm purpose of amendment, and the candid declaration of their sins; and who often go to confession merely because they are sent by their parents or teachers? Do they not, in many cases, alas! continue making bad confessions for five, ten, or twenty years, bringing down to old age on their heavily-laden consciences the first mortal sin they committed, along with all the sins that followed it?

II. Hence a general confession is necessary to some souls and very useful to many. Let us not wait till a messenger comes from the other world to warn us of the state of our souls. If, through some grievous error our confessions have been invalid, or if we have good reason to doubt their validity, then a general confession is not only very useful for us, but it is actually necessary for our salvation. The penitent David was such a holy man, that after his conversion, his conscience could not reproach him with a single sin which he had not candidly confessed to the Lord and had not shed bitter tears of repentance for, day and night; yet, he could not rest on account of the fear of having committed some grievous fault, in his youth, through ignorance and want of consideration, and, in order to ease his mind, he had recourse to a general confession. "I will confess against myself," he says, "my injustice to the Lord" (Ps. 31:5). "My injustice," that is, all my sins. Ah! How much greater reason have not many of us to adopt the same means! This sermon is not intended for scrupulous and over-anxious souls; but rather, for those who have never made a general confession, and who will derive from it a calm of conscience, a greater sorrow of heart for their sins, and a thorough cleansing of the soul.

Let no one try to excuse himself by saying that he has no time for this, that he has other things to attend to; that, such matters are well enough for Religious, but that men of the world cannot devote themselves to it. You have other business to attend to? Is there any business in the world so important as that of your immortal soul, whose eternal happiness perhaps depends on your making a good general confession? Answer me now in the words of the catechism: Why are you in this world? What is the end of your being? Is it to keep your house, or to further your temporal business or occupation? These things, according to the decrees of Providence, are only means to be directed by you to the great end, to the only important business, for which you were created. Christ said to Martha in the Gospel: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. But one

thing is necessary” (St. Luke 10:41, 42). “But one thing is necessary;” namely, to serve God, to love Him above all things, and thereby, to save your soul and make sure of eternal happiness. Think often of the warning of our Lord: “What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?” (St. Matthew 16:26).

The very excuse you allege, that you are burdened with temporal cares, makes a general confession much more useful, nay, even necessary to you. For if business cares so closely occupy your time that you cannot give an exact account of your daily actions, as they are in the sight of God, it is only right that you should set apart a certain time during the year in which to regulate your accounts with God by a general confession. Perhaps you do not even examine your conscience before going to rest each night, as do pious Christians, who fear God and are anxious to save their souls? In all places, at home and abroad, since you have to do with all kinds of people, you are exposed to many occasions and dangers of sin in thought, word, and deed, and you can hardly be expected to come off victor in all those encounters. With a mind full of distractions, you go to confession every three months, or even every month, and perhaps, you have not yet made a general confession. Now, is it not evident that, if you are concerned about the salvation of your soul, the very circumstance you bring forward as an excuse should be an additional motive for you to prepare for a general confession?

“I have no time for it.” Ah, God help! No time for the one thing to which you should devote your whole life! You can spend a whole year in the service of the world, but you cannot spare half a day in examining your conscience and cleansing your soul from the stain of sin? Four times a year, you have your house, its furniture, and even your kitchen utensils cleaned from top to bottom; but you have no time to give your conscience a thorough purifying? You have time enough to pay and to receive unnecessary visits; time enough to talk, when you had better keep silent; time enough to waste in decking out your perishable body with all sorts of finery, for which you will have to render a strict account at the bar of divine; time enough to spend in amusements and parties, in gambling and in other diversions that will likely supply you with matter for your next confession but you have no time to arrange your accounts with God, your future Judge? No time to place your soul in safety and quiet? No time to begin a better life? In a word, no time to secure for yourself an eternity of happiness after this short life? Away with such excuses!

Divide your life into periods; from your seventh to your twelfth year; from your twelfth year to the time when you entered on a permanent state of life, a period during which, generally speaking, most sins are committed, on account of the vehemence of passion and the inconsiderateness of youth; and finally, from that time to the present. Go through the Ten Commandments, and see what you have done against them in the different periods. Your confessor will help you in this, if you come to him at a time when he has no other penitents to attend to, (for it is generally better not to make such a confession when there are many people waiting). The sins that you cannot remember after reasonable diligence in the examen of your conscience you are not bound to tell; nor are you expected to be so exact in declaring the number of your sins as in your ordinary confessions, unless you have to make good some fault committed in declaring them. Try it, in God’s name, and you will find that it is not such a very difficult matter, after all. You will thank him who advised you to take that step, when you find what peace it will bring your conscience; and being completely cleansed from your sins, you will be enabled to begin anew life and to say, with the Apostle: “I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20), whom alone I am resolved to love with all my heart for the remainder of my life! Amen.

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