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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

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Careful Preparation for Death

"I therefore beseech you...that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called." Ephes. 4:1

According to St. Paul, in the Epistle of today, we must persevere in the way of virtue, so that our lives may be consistent with the holiness of the Christian faith, to which they were called by God in preference to many nations. For we have received from the infinite goodness of God the great grace of vocation to the true Catholic Christian faith. We are called, but in order to be chosen we must frequently think of death with deep attention and practically, so that our meditations may urge us to lead a good life, that we may die a happy death. That is the meaning of the words of the Apostle: "I therefore beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called;" that you may be thereby prepared for death. How, and for how long a time, should we prepare? I answer:

For a long time beforehand, nay, all the time of our lives, we should prepare for the approach of death.

The more important a business, the more depends on it, the less experience we have of it, and the more difficult it is in itself, the greater also will be the care we take, the longer the preparation we make, so that it may terminate favorably. A lawyer has undertaken a case on which depends the gain or loss of some hundred thousand dollars. His opponent is very powerful; he spares no trouble or expense, and seeks patrons for his cause wherever he can find them to insure his own success and your injury. He is most warmly urged and exhorted to take an interest in the case, and to do his best to disprove the documents and writings that will be brought forward against him. Tell me, is there any lawyer in the world who values his own honor and profit who would trust the whole matter to his own cleverness, ingenuity, and good memory, so far as to put off studying the case until the very last day, when the judge is ready to pronounce sentence, and would then hope to gain the case by hurriedly reading over the evidence and studying the proofs? No, indeed! Our experience teaches far differently. For we know what an amount of thought, study, speculation, examination, running hither and thither, finding out facts and writing it costs in order to win a case. And how often are not meals interrupted, sleep shortened, and years of toil undertaken in order to gain a suit that is perhaps not worth the twentieth part of the costs? You, ladies and gentlemen, you have to marry your daughters to husbands suitable to their rank. The contract is agreed to, the date for the marriage fixed; do you think also of the bride's trousseau, of the clothes suitable for the occasion, of the entertainments and wedding festivities that have to be given? Truly you do! But

when do you begin to prepare these things? You wait, do you not, until the day comes when the wedding party is going to church? Not by any means, you answer; we should be very foolish to wait as long as that. We make our preparations weeks and months beforehand. Why so? Because otherwise we should be too late, and it is a matter in which our honor is concerned. So prudent are we in temporal things.

Is the affair of our eternal salvation, then, of less importance, so that we can put it off until the time when it is to be really concluded? Our Lord compares his coming at our death to that of the bridegroom who knocks in the middle of the night, when no one expects him: "And at midnight there was a cry made: Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him" (Matt. 25:6). At your last breath you shall hear the words: go forth to meet him; arise; now is the time in which you are to be espoused to the sovereign Ruler of the world, to reign with him for all eternity. Where is the wedding-garment of sanctifying grace? Where are your ornaments, your jewels, your merits and virtues that you may appear worthily before such a great Lord? Woe to you if you should have put off to the last moment the preparation for the great marriage-feast! I know you not, the Bridegroom will say, as he said to the foolish virgins who had not oil in their lamps. "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage" (Matt. 6:10); "they that were ready," not they who then began for the first time to prepare. These latter were excluded: "the door was shut" (Matt. 15:10). Each one of us has a difficult, very important, and very complicated suit depending on the divine justice. It is a difficult suit, because many and very many, nay, the most of men, and perhaps the most of adult Christians will lose it. It is a very important suit, because on its gain or loss depends the gain or loss, not of a piece of land, not of a capital of a million of dollars, but of an immortal soul; on its issue depends whether our lot for eternity shall be with the reprobate or the elect. It is a very complicated suit; the demons of hell, the dangerous occasions that are to be met with in the world, and the lusts of the flesh are our opponents, whose sole effort from the begin-ning of our lives is to destroy us. And if we enter into our own consciences, we must acknowledge that we have made matters much worse through our own fault, by our manifold sins.

Have we not every reason to prepare ourselves in time and with all earnestness, to examine our consciences, to repent of our sins, and to settle our accounts with God? In time, I say; for why should we wait any longer? What grounds can we have for a hope of salvation if we defer our preparation for death till death itself is at hand? Shall we, perhaps, be able to put it off until we are ready? That kind of a thing might indeed be done in temporal affairs. If it is found that after due diligence and care all the things required for the marriage-feast are not ready, the ceremony is put off for a week or two, or even longer if necessary. If a lawsuit is decided against me the first time, I can appeal and have a new trial. But what can we put in the way of death to defer his coming? Nothing. It is impossible to put him off; whether we are ready or not, we must go at the appointed time.

In temporal matters, if one makes a mistake the first time, he can be on his guard the second time and repair his former error. If you have lost a lawsuit and suffered injury thereby, you can make up for the loss by redoubled diligence. But if you have once made a mistake in death, there is no chance of coming back to amend it. If you have lost the suit of your eternal salvation, because you did not prepare in time, you have lost it without any possibility of regaining it. Even if one makes a mistake in matters concerning his eternal salvation during life, there is still time to recover what has been lost. If today I were to make a sacrilegious confession, either through want of proper preparation or because I have not true sorrow for my sins, or because I have concealed a sin willfully, that would be truly a great evil, great enough to expose me to the danger of damnation; but yet I must not despair; tomorrow, or even to-day, I can go to confession again and free my soul from the evil. But if I am so unfortunate as to die an unhappy death, I cannot come back any more, but must remain forever in the state in which death has found me.

What follows from this? That since our salvation or damnation depends on our death; since we cannot hope for anything greater than salvation, or dread and fear anything more than damnation, the most important, nay, the only business we have to attend to during life, the one end to which should be directed all our thoughts and cares, should be to die a happy death; and hence we must at all times use our utmost diligence in preparing to die well, and be always ready for the hour when the Lord will come to take us. This is the reason why we are on this earth; that we may prepare worthily for his coming. This is the thought that should be always before our minds to stimulate us; that should be always in our memories crying out to us: prepare for death! 'Whenever the clock strikes we are already another hour nearer to death. During our whole lives we should learn how to die.

Why are we so careless, indifferent, and forgetful in this great affair on which all depends? Everything else in the world interests us; in everything else we wish to act with prudence. To live, to live long, to live in good health, fortune and prosperity, to avoid suffering and misfortune; this thought drives the hand to labor, the feet to activity, the whole mind to reflection and meditation; for these things every one wishes to be prepared, and dreads coming too late. Death and what comes after it is almost the only thing that is forgotten. The last thought with most people is when, how, or where they shall die, or what means they should use to die well. The mere remembrance of death and eternity, suggested in a sermon, is looked on with chagrin and annoyance, and thrust out of the mind as a melancholy thought, likely to disturb our peace and the enjoyment of those sensual pleasures that we do not wish to give up.

Most men live in such a manner that they are hardly aware of death at all until he knocks at their doors and is about to strike the fatal blow. How many there are amongst you who require a mortal illness, the very presence of death, to warn you effectively to prepare for eternity! After twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years squandered away without doing anything for salvation; after body and soul have been exhausted in the service of some earthly master, who cannot help to gain heaven; after having devoted all one's cares, thoughts, and labor to the world; after these things; after having suffered so much discomfort, annoyance, and misery without resignation to the will of God, without any profit for eternity; after having spent in vanity, idleness, and sin of all kinds the precious time given by God; after having bestowed hardly a thought on the last end; after the conscience has been hardly once purified by a true repentance; after all this death comes and summons us into eternity. Then it is too late to know that we must die. Then it is in vain that we sigh for time to prepare, to amend our lives, to do something for our soul; then we must die as we have lived, unprepared.

Seneca justly looked on him as a fool who feared death only when he heard the thunder rolling and saw the lightning flashing: "Oh, foolish man, and forgetful of your frailty, if you fear death only when it thunders!" If there were any exceptions to the general law of death; if one by forgetting death and rejecting all thought of it could avoid it and save himself from the common fate, then, indeed, we should be excused for seeking all sorts of means of escaping it, of not thinking of it, instead of preparing for its approach; like little children who, when they imagine they see a ghost, put their hands before their eyes, and think that they cannot be seen then and are safe from all danger. But we may cover our eyes as much as we please, we may think of it or not, death will come on at his own pace, nearer and nearer every day, hour, and moment; and he will hurry us off without any one being able to protect us from him. The sentence already pronounced is irrevocable: "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Hebr. 9:27), and no one is excepted. To all, rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick, prince and peasant, are the words uttered: "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live" (Is. 38:1).

Never forget that it is you who must die, that another will come after you and succeed to your place. Ah, why, then, do you live so careless of your soul? Why do you think so little of the long eternity of happiness or misery that awaits you? "You shall die and shall not live;" it is you who must die and that perhaps soon; you cannot send another in your place into eternity; you yourself must journey thither, and leave behind all that you ever possessed or shall possess in the world. Why, then, should you be so concerned for temporal things, since you cannot take them with you? Why do you desire, seek, and love that which God has forbidden you to seek and love? Why do you long for that which will keep you from heaven, embitter your death, and precipitate you into the flames of hell forever?

Prepare for death. But in what manner? At once do that which you shall have to do in your last illness if you wish to die well, but which you shall then possibly not be able to do properly. To square our accounts with God, to bewail all the sins of our past lives with a contrite heart, and candidly confess them in the holy Sacrament of Penance, to form the earnest purpose of never again, for all eternity, committing a sin, to make what restitution you can for the injuries done your neighbor in his property or character, to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, and atone, by good example, for scandal given, to lay aside completely all feelings of disunion, hatred, and anger against your neighbor, and to pardon from the heart and be reconciled to all who have injured you, to make up for lost time by being more zealous in the service of God; ah, to do all that when death is already knocking at the door, when the body is writhing in pain, the heart filled with anguish and the mind bewildered, ah, truly that is not the time for such a weighty business! Therefore the beginning must be made at once, and that today, so that everything may be duly attended to. Now you must do what you shall wish to have done on your death-bed, but shall then be unable to do; that is, you must live as you shall desire to have lived on your

death-bed; you must do and avoid what on your death-bed you shall wish to have done and avoided and by a frequent reception of the holy Sacraments, resignation to the will of God, patience under trials, and a good supernatural intention in all your daily duties, you must prepare for the coming of the Lord. Amen.

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