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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

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Advantage of a General Confession as Far as the Next Life Is Concerned

“Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee.” St. Matthew 9:2

In appearing before our Lord the paralytic of today’s Gospel only sought to recover the health of his body; but, along with that he received something infinitely more valuable, for which he did not even dream of asking, namely, the forgiveness of his sins and the sanctification of his soul. “Be of good heart, son,” were the words he heard from our Lord, “thy sins are forgiven thee.” O spiritual paralytics! Come quickly and appeal to this same good and merciful God. Make known to him, in the holy Sacrament of Penance, the maladies from which you suffer, and beg of him with contrite hearts to help and heal you. Last Sunday I showed that a general confession of one’s whole life, or, at least, of the time that has elapsed since the last general confession, is the best means of cleansing one’s soul from sin, as far as the past is concerned. As a further encouragement to us to have recourse to this means, I now say,

- I. *That it is also the best means of placing the soul in safety and security for the next life; and I shall proceed to indicate*
- II. *Who are they that are bound to make a general confession of their whole lives.*

I. The true repose, safety and consolation of the soul in this life consist in a good conscience. Our ordinary confessions are special renderings of accounts that we make to God every three months, or month, or fortnight, or week, according as we go to confession frequently or not; and if we have always a true sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment, they are signed by God as valid, and we can be easy in conscience. But whenever one discovers on solid grounds that he has committed some notable error in one or other of those confessions, in order to allay his doubts and bring repose to his conscience once for all, the best thing he can do is to examine all his former accounts, that is, to make a general examination of his conscience, and a confession, either of the sins of his whole life, or of those he has committed since his last general confession.

In a confession of this kind, one receives a document signed with the Blood of Jesus Christ, to prove that his past accounts are all in good order; and that, having conscientiously discharged his debts, God will make no further claim on him as far as his past sins are concerned. And even if he forgets some grievous sins in that confession, he is still assured (since he has used all reasonable diligence), that he has done all that is required on his part to repent properly, and, therefore, that he will never again, during his whole life, be bound to confess those sins, or even to think of them.

But how long will that peace of mind last, you may ask? God help us! Before we have time to look round, we fall into mortal sin again and are just as bad as before. So, what is the good of a general confession? Do you, then, really think it is of no use? Even suppose that you fall again into sin after your general confession, does

that render useless all you have done? Do you not carefully clean out your kettle, although you know that it will soon become rusty again? Will you not sweep out your room, because you know that in a day it will be filled with dust? You have, at all events, the consolation of knowing that for the remainder of your life, nay, for all eternity, your conscience is purified from the sins of all those past years, and from all anxiety and reasonable doubt concerning them. Is not that consolation enough? Besides, it is much easier for you to confess, from year to year, the sins you may commit in future. Do you still think a general confession of no use?

But you say that you have scarcely time to look round, when you fall again into sin. Yes, that may easily be the case after ordinary confessions, in which you have not, perhaps, true sorrow or a firm purpose of amendment; but there is not so much danger of it when one, out of a pure desire of being converted to God with his whole heart, makes a general confession, and thereby thoroughly cleanses his conscience. He who is already in the State of sin is not, as a rule, very scrupulous about committing fresh sins; the next confession, he thinks, will clear them all away. But when the conscience is once thoroughly purified, which is done with greater certainty by a general confession, one is most careful not to sully it again by a mortal sin. God will not allow himself to be outdone in generosity by a creature; and there are special graces and helps which he gives to him who has been converted with his whole heart. Many experienced souls could bear me out in this by testifying with truth, that for years after their first general confession they did not commit one mortal sin. Many others have been known to declare that during their whole lives they never again fell back into grievous sin. There have been Saints to whom a general confession was the beginning of their heroic sanctity. And Oh, what great consolation is to be derived from it in the hour of death, in that terrible moment, when the command is given to us: "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live!" (Isai. 38:1). I do not doubt for a moment that, when the last hour comes for us, we shall be glad to have got rid of all stain of sin completely by a good general confession; or, at least, if we have not made one up to that time, we shall certainly wish to make one then. And why do we not do so at once, since we have now a favorable opportunity? A gentleman who, while still in good health, wished to make a general confession. The priest having questioned him as to his reasons for that determination: "Why do you ask me?" was the answer: "Must I not die some time or other? Is not death always hurrying after me? How do I know when, where, and how it will overtake me? In my last illness, I will have enough to do with my sickness and sufferings, with my children, domestics, and the friends who will visit me; so that I now wish to take time by the forelock, and to do with the greatest care that on which my eternal salvation depends, and which I shall probably not be able to attend to in my last moments." Let us all follow the example of this prudent and good Christian. Now, that we are sound in mind and body, let us do what we shall certainly wish to have done on our death-bed, and cleanse our souls from all the sins of our lives by a good general confession; and then, whether death comes soon or late, suddenly or after a long illness, we can meet it bravely and with the assurance of eternal salvation; for it will never find us unprepared. But let us now consider

II. To whom a general confession should be recommended.

1. First, ordinarily speaking, to those who have never made a general confession. It is absolutely necessary for those whose past confessions have been wanting in any important essential full confession of all mortal sins, supernatural sorrow or firm purpose of amendment. Moreover, he who has for years led a dissolute, sinful life, or has been careless in the divine service, and now feels an inspiration from God to begin a new and a better mode of life, will find that a general confession is not only useful, but even necessary. For others, it is very advantageous, in order to set their consciences more at rest, and give more stability to their good resolutions.

2. Second, should those who have already made with reasonable diligence a general confession of their whole lives repeat that confession? No! Generally speaking, that would not be good for most people, while for some it would be positively injurious, for others very dangerous, and for none necessary.

There are some anxious, melancholy, and scrupulous souls who are never at ease, no matter how often they go to confession. They are always dejected and filled with bitterness of heart. They never can satisfy their uneasy consciences, which are forever racked with an unreasonable doubt, an ever-recurring "perhaps." The more they examine themselves, the more bewildered they become. For such people a repetition of their general confession would be not only useless, but even highly injurious; it would be for them, not a medicine giving relief, but rather a poison to aggravate their disease. People who have sore eyes, the more they rub them, the worse they become. So with these souls, who when they have once told all their sins in confession, must think of them no more. They should take to heart as specially addressed to themselves, those words of the Wise Man: "Think of

the Lord in goodness and seek him in simplicity of heart; for he is found by them that tempt him not; and he showeth himself to them that have faith in him” (Wisd. 1:1, 2). As little children allow themselves to be guided by their mothers, so they, too, must follow blindly the advice of their confessor. If he tells them that they are not to make a general confession, although they have never made one, they must obey. If he tells them even not to examine their conscience before confession, they must humbly obey him. And, in fact, if they, who suffer from this spiritual malady, do not submit humbly and obediently, without a word of complaint, to their ordinary confessor, they will never recover their spiritual health. Scruples arise from ignorance or from a melancholy disposition, or, as often happens, from the secret pride and obstinacy of those who are unwilling to submit their judgment to people who know more than they do; or else, they may arise from an inscrutable decree of God’s Providence, who wishes to make us humble and to withdraw us from the vanities of the world. But from whatever cause scruples arise, the souls that are affected with them can only be cured of them by blind obedience to the confessor.

3. I do not reckon amongst the scrupulous those who lead an idle, useless life, and easily fall into mortal sin, or who are the occasion of others falling into it; nor those who do not try to fulfill their bounden duties and obligations. Although, when such persons come to confession, they are scrupulous about many sinless things, while they neglect or pay little attention to real sins. What folly for a man who is sunk in vice to have a scruple about stepping on a cross of straw, or omitting his usual prayers or works of devotion, and so on! Scruples of that kind are like those of the high priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, who were afraid of defiling themselves by entering the judgment-hall of Pilate, or receiving back the thirty pieces of silver from Judas, while they had not the least hesitation about suborning false witnesses, and glutting their hatred by condemning the innocent Son of God to a disgraceful death. Nor do I reckon as scrupulous those who associate freely with persons of the opposite sex; who dance and amuse themselves, allowing full liberty to eyes, ears, hands, and all their senses, yet, when they come to confession, are scrupulous as to whether they have consented to impure thoughts or actions. Scruples of that kind are very well founded, indeed! They are like the scruple of the peasant who said to his confessor: “Father, there is something else that I have a scruple about.” “And what is it?” “I have stolen a horse.”

4. There are many who have lived in impurity for a long time and have committed many sins through that horrible vice. For these, the frequent repetition of such sins in a general confession would be not only useless and unnecessary, but even very dangerous. It would be like trying to extinguish a fire by throwing oil on it, or to drive away a hungry dog by giving him a piece of meat, which would only attract him all the more. It is like to stirring up a noisome sink, the only effect of which is to create a foul odor. In the same way, the only effect of recalling sins of impurity is to give occasion to other unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore, once such sins have been got rid of by a good general confession, they must be forgotten completely, be buried in oblivion. Nor should they ever be mentioned in confession again, unless in a general way; for instance, I am sorry for all sins of my past life that I committed against holy purity; not a word more should be said about them. Other sins may be mentioned freely, if one wishes to do so, (although that is not necessary, once a general confession of them has been made); especially when one has to go to another confessor, that the latter may know the state of his penitent’s conscience.

I would advise you, who have not yet made a general confession, to make one at once, and keep up the practice of making one every year, of all the sins that you have committed since your last general confession. If you do that, you will be able to console yourselves at the end of your life with the assurance that you have squared all your accounts with God. But, some will say: “What is the use of going to so much trouble? I am not uneasy about my past confessions; I did what I could to make them well.” So much the better for you that you have no apparent need of a general confession. Still, you will find it of the greatest advantage in cleansing your conscience more thoroughly and giving you more peace of mind. Was it necessary for the pious king Ezechias to examine, as he did, his whole life? No, he did it out of devotion, and for the sake of greater security, thereby giving us an example, which we would do well to imitate. “I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul” (Isa. 36:15), says Ezechias, after he had been restored to health and strength. He does not say merely that he will think of his sins, but that he will recount them; that is, he is not satisfied with bewailing them once; but in the bitterness of his soul he will deplore all his sins one by one. He will examine not merely the sins of one year, but those of his whole life: “I will recount to thee all my years.” Why did St. Paul, the great Apostle of

the Gentiles, publish his sins in the Epistle he wrote to his disciple Timothy: “Who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and contumelious” (I Tim. 1:13)? Was it necessary for him to make such a public confession? Or did he still stand in need of pardon? But all his sins were forgiven in Baptism, as he acknowledges in the same verse of the same Epistle: “But I obtained the mercy of God”(I ibid.). The reason of his doing so was that he knew well the advantage to be derived from the sorrowful recollection and repeated confession of his sins. If St. Paul, who had the assurance of being forgiven, acted in that way, what should not the ordinary Christian do, who has not such an assurance? Ask St. Augustine why he published the confession of his sins, so that every one might read it. Was he obliged to do it? No, he says himself. “It is solely out of love for thee, O Lord,” he exclaims, “that I publish the iniquities of my life.”

There is no doubt that the crafty tempter will try to put all kinds of difficulties in our way, to hinder us from making a general confession. Long experience has taught him, that many souls are rescued from him by that means; but let us only bravely and seriously undertake this work, so necessary for our souls, and we shall make the hour of our death one of consolation and joy. Amen.

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