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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

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Premature Death of the Idle

"They brought to him one sick of the palsy, lying in a bed." St. Matthew 9:2.

Pitiable is the state of one in a palsy! Afflicted in every member of his body, he can scarcely move a finger, much less can he walk or stand, or help himself in any way; all he can do is to lie in bed. He is of no use to any one, to himself or to others, but is rather a burden; and unless he is cured in some extraordinary way the only thing that he can hope for is a speedy death. The paralytic man is a true picture of the idle man, who wastes his precious time doing nothing or squanders it in useless occupations; he is of no good to himself or to others, and if he does not amend his life what else can he expect from God but to be called away by a premature death? So it is, as I now proceed to prove.

The idle man is of no use in the world; therefore he deserves that God should take him out of it by a premature death.

There is no creature in the whole world, no matter how vile it may be, that is not of some use or other. The various weeds that grow in our gardens and fields and on the public highways, and that are trodden under foot by the passers-by; the insects, flies, wasps, and vermin that torment us, have been created for a special object, and they are useful and helpful to men, although we cannot always see how that is. Nothing can be utterly useless; and if it were possible for any creature to have no object for its existence that creature, according to philosophers, would at once be rejected and cast out by nature as superfluous. A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. "What!" said he in anger to his gardener: "Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this tree, and I find none. Why should I allow it to stand any longer? "Cut it down, therefore; why cumbereth it the ground?" (Luke 13:6, 7) A good tree might be planted in the place of this useless one. Away with it, therefore, and throw it into the fire. Here you have a vivid picture of the man who leads an idle life, who spends the greater part of the day doing nothing; that is, in sleeping late in the morning, taking a long time to dress, eating and drinking, paying and receiving visits, gambling and amusing himself, walking, standing at the door and window talking and chatting. In a word, he wastes the day in trifles of all kinds, has no order in important affairs, and no becoming occupation for head or hand. Why cumbereth he the ground? Why should a man of that kind remain on earth any longer? Come, death!

So must the angry Creator say; cut him down! Away with that useless tree! Let that idle man be no longer of the number of the living! For he is good for nothing; neither for himself, nor for others, nor for God!

1. He is useless for himself because he does nothing for the end of his creation. "Man is born to labor, and the bird to fly" (Job 5:7); and God has commanded man to work constantly and diligently, that he may gain eternal rest. Yes, there is no creature on earth less adapted for rest and idleness than man. And no one is dispensed from this, no matter what his rank or condition may be; no one is exempted from the law of toil and labor. Not even the prince and first father of all men, Adam, could evade it. While he was still innocent and just, and in the garden of paradise, where idleness was not so apt as it now is to lead to a wicked, reckless life, even there he was commanded by God to labor: "And the Lord God... put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). But was Adam obliged to work in order to provide himself with food? No; he had not to work for a livelihood, since he was master of the whole earth, and that earth would of itself, without cultivation, have produced fruits and means of livelihood in abundance. Why, then, had he to work? For the sake of having a becoming occupation, that he might live as a reasonable being who must never be idle, but always have some suitable work to employ his time at. But when Adam, transgressed the divine command, ate the forbidden fruit, lost his first justice, and was expelled from paradise, how was it with him then? Alas! Then was another sentence pronounced on him; for he had to work then, not merely for the sake of having a becoming occupation, but to earn his bread with toil and labor and the sweat of his brow: a sentence which fell on all his descendants. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," said God to him, "till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and into dust shalt thou return."

2. A dead body is not only useless to itself, because it can neither walk, nor stand, nor see, nor hear, nor move, but it is also troublesome, injurious, and intolerable to others who are in the house in which it is lying; for once it begins to decay it fills the place with an abominable stench; therefore it is put out of sight and buried as soon as possible. This is the custom in the world. It is also the way in which God is wont to act with the idle man, as we read in the parable of the barren fig-tree. "Why cumbereth it the ground?" as if to say: since that tree is barren it ought to be cut down. But that is not the only mischief it does. It cumpers the ground; it takes up the place of a fruitful tree, and moreover deprives the trees and plants in its neighborhood of the moisture and nourishment they should have. Away with it, then; cut it down; I will no longer have it in my vineyard. So, too, God says: Why should that idle man live any longer? He bears no fruit for his soul, and takes up the place of others who would employ their time in a manner more pleasing to God and more useful to the world. The luxuries that he indulges in daily could feed many decent poor, who can earn hardly enough by hard labor to support themselves and their children. What he spends on dress for mere outward show could clothe many a poor person decently. What he squanders in gambling and amusing himself could support many a poor family. The duties he has undertaken to perform he neglects, because he dislikes work; thus he is the cause of injury to others. Cut it down therefore! Away with the barren tree! Just as the tree deserves to be cut down, so the idle man ought to be cut off from the number of the living.

Amongst all well-ordered nations and peoples idleness was always held in detestation, as hurtful not only to the individual, but to the community at large. Cleomenes, the Spartan king, being asked why he did not destroy his enemy, as he could easily have done, answered: "No, that would not be good for my country; as long as we have an enemy to fight we have occupation, and that will keep us from idleness, which is the source of all disorder and misfortune in a country, and is most injurious to the common weal" Such, too, was the opinion of Scipio, a wise and experienced man amongst the ancient Romans. These people had subdued almost the whole world, and after they had conquered the Carthaginians and Greeks, who had resisted them longest, their exultation knew no bounds. "Now," they said, "our republic is in safety." "And now, too," said Scipio with a deep sigh, "our republic is in the greatest danger, greater than ever before; for now that we have no foreign enemy to fight idleness will show itself amongst us, and with it the vices that spring from it, and finally the ruin of our republic." And subsequent events proved the truth of these words.

3. The idler is useless; for if he is of no use to himself or to his neighbor, neither is he of any to his God, whom he should serve. There are many who imagine that to avoid idleness and fill up the time with some becoming occupation, thus turning it to profit for one's soul, is necessary only for those who cannot otherwise find the means of livelihood, or as a salutary work of supererogation for those who desire to gain greater glory in heaven; but that there is no law of God binding every one under pain of sin to work. But they are vastly

mistaken. It is certain that all adults who do not receive heaven as their reward will be punished forever in hell; now the Lord has said that he will not give heaven unless to those who work diligently for it: "Call the laborers and pay them their hire" (Matt. 22:8). And it is also infallibly certain that the just God will demand a strict account of every idle word: "But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak they shall render an account for it in the Day of Judgment" (Matt. 12:36). It is to no purpose that they try to excuse themselves by saying: we do no harm; we do not commit a sin by seeking our comfort. What? You do no harm? You lead an idle life, and commit no sin? That is, humanly speaking, an impossibility. Even if no mortal sin is committed for some time, that very idleness itself is evil doing. For not to do good, what is it, if not to do evil? "Hand in hand the evil man shall not be innocent" (Prov. 11:21); when the hands are folded together, doing nothing and having nothing to do, there is little use in looking for innocence and piety.

The Scripture says of Magdalene: "Behold a woman that was in the city a sinner" (Luke 7:36). In what did her wickedness consist, that she was called a sinner? Mary Magdalene appeared to a pious person in Spain who was saying the office in her honor, and said to that person: "In my lifetime I was a notorious sinner in the city, yet not in the way in which people generally understand the term; for the impure and unchaste actions imputed to me I never even dreamt of. I was of noble birth, and dwelt in a castle, and my only sin was idleness." In the morning (so continues the description of her life), after lying long in bed, her whole occupation was to stand before the looking-glass and contemplate her beauty, taking a vain pleasure therein, curling her hair, and dressing in costly array; she was not content with the natural comeliness given her by God, but sought to increase it by the use of all sorts of cosmetics. Thus splendidly dressed, after having taken her meals, she did nothing the whole day but walk about the city, showing herself off and trying to attract attention. There was no social gathering at which Magdalene was not present, no company in which she was not to be found. She laughed, joked, and amused herself till late at night, and thereby gave occasion for impure desires in some, for rash judgments, suspicions, and envy in others, and scandal in nearly all. This was the life that deserved to be described by the Holy Ghost in the words: "A woman that was in the city a sinner." And she was the woman from whom our Lord drove out seven devils, that is, the seven deadly sins. And yet her life was only an idle, pleasure-seeking life.

How many Magdalenes are there not nowadays in our Christian cities? How many young girls and married women who lead the same useless, luxurious life? how many are there not of the male sex who could with reason be classed amongst them in this respect, for they consume the precious time of their youth and manhood in walking about the streets, paying useless visits, gambling, eating, drinking, and doing nothing? And yet they maintain that they are doing no harm in all this, and are indignant with those who dare to describe them as sinners in the city! But when they appear before the judgment seat of God they shall learn, when too late, what they were in life; namely, useless for themselves and their own souls, which they neglected; useless for their neighbor and their children, to whom they gave bad example; useless, finally, for their God and for his service, which they did not render him. Amen.

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