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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 + + +

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TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Incurableness of the Vice of Impurity

“For he was at the point of death.” St. John 4:47

That is a time when one requires help, when one is at the point of death. But it is also a time when great skill is required to help; and it is a certain sign that a disease is incurable when nothing but a miracle on the part of God can cure it. With reason, then, did the ruler, in today’s Gospel, beg of our Lord to come: “Lord, come down, before that my son dies;” there is no time for delay, because he has already begun to breathe his last. A malady of that kind is impurity, and it is an incurable and desperate malady, so that he who is infected with it has already begun to die an eternal death. For when it has once become deep-rooted it can hardly be cured, unless by a miracle of divine grace. The reason of that

I. There is no vice which so binds the human understandings.

II. No vice which so hardens the human will in wickedness, as the vice of impurity.

I. Zeuxis once painted a picture of a young man carrying grapes so naturally that the birds came and pecked at the canvas, thinking that the grapes were real. All who saw the picture praised it, and wondered at the skill of the artist. Zeuxis alone was dissatisfied at it, on account of a great fault he observed in it. And what fault was that? If, he said, the grapes are painted so well that the birds come and peck at them, the boy who is carrying them must be very badly painted, or else the birds would be afraid to come so near him. Now, what do I mean by this? A similar picture is drawn before the human understanding by sensual desires; but they paint in vivid colors only what is pleasing and flattering to the senses; so that the ardent desire of enjoying those pleasures may not be interfered with by shame or fear.

Meanwhile, all the bitterness and torment that such pleasures cause, and everything that could frighten men away from them, is carefully kept in the background, so that the understanding is blinded, and neither sees nor desires to see any of those deterrent causes; nay, once it has become enslaved by impurity, it is incapable of seeing or recognizing them. Thus, the impure man is not frightened by the omnipresence and omnipotence of God, from whom nothing is concealed, and who can annihilate him in an instant, during the actual commission of his shameful crime; nor by the uncertainty of death, which may surprise him in the midst of his wickedness, and hand him over to the devil, as it has done with many already; nor by the strictness of divine justice, before which even the Saints have trembled, and which he may have to face with his sin still fresh upon him; nor by the thought of the beauty and endless joys of heaven, which he barter so miserably for a momentary gratification; nor by the terrors of hell, which follow on the loss of heaven; it is enough to make one’s hair stand on end

to think of burning in a fire forever, without any hope of being released! Yes, these are truths which he often thought of formerly, and they inspired him with a fear of sin; they caused him to feel a bitter remorse the first time he gratified his impure desires, and they kept him for a time in constant uneasiness; they are truths that can terrify any other sinner, no matter how wicked he is, and bring him to repentance and amendment of life.

But the unchaste man, who has become addicted to sensual pleasures, or who has been enmeshed in the toils of an impure attachment for any creature, is no more impressed by those truths than he would be by the fables of the old pagan poets. He does not even think of them; if his blinded understanding is still capable of having a thought of the kind, he puts it away at once. He has no eyes, as St. Augustine, an experienced witness, says, for anything but the filth in which he is immersed.

What a holy and perfect man David was; a man after God's own heart, who always walked in the presence of God. David, I say, had hardly looked with a lustful eye on Bethsabee, and committed sin with her, when he spent a whole year without thinking of God, although after the death of Urias he had taken her to wife, and could have a lawful affection for her. So much was he infatuated with this vice that he did not even see how wicked he was until Nathan explained it to him by the well-known parable of the poor man's ewe lamb; then his eyes were opened, and he remembered his God, and how grievously he had sinned, and he cried out: "I have sinned against the Lord."

If there are any unfortunates here present who are victims of an unlawful passion, I call them all to witness if such is not their own experience? No matter how pious, devout and zealous they were in the divine service, as soon as they were ensnared by impurity, did they not at once lose all taste and inclination for piety and good works? It cannot be otherwise; for: "the sensual man perceiveth not those things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand" (1Cor. 2:14); the light of his understanding is gone out, and he no longer finds joy or pleasure in anything but the gratification of his brutish passion. While thus blinded, he pays no attention to his other duties and obligations; his honor and good name, his position and authority, his office and dignity, farewell to them all, once his desires get the upper hand. The father forgets what he owes his children, the child what he owes his parents; the husband forgets his wife, the wife her husband; the man of high position forgets the character he has to keep up before the people; the young man forgets his advancement, the young girl her virginal honor. All these things are utterly disregarded when unlawful love gains the upper hand.

In this blindness sins are heaped on sins with the utmost recklessness. The demon of impurity is called in Holy Scriptures, Asmodeus, which means in Hebrew, an abundance of sins; to signify that the unchaste body is like a heap of countless sins of all kinds. And such is really the case. The thief does not steal every day; the murderer is not always taking away people's lives; the passionate man is not always cursing and swearing; the vindictive man does not always seek revenge; the drunkard is not always intoxicated; but the impure man who is entangled in the snares of a guilty passion commits so many sins every day that his life is like a stormy sea, in which one mountain-wave of sin drives away another. We might say that with other vices the devil fishes for sins with a hook; he has to wait a long time often, before the bait is taken; but with impurity he catches sins, as it were in a net, and by the hundred. If the impure man wishes to confess his sins, he cannot count them all; it is, humanly speaking, impossible to do so, and his confessor has only to ask how long, how many weeks, months or years he has been in the habit of impurity so as to be able to give a guess at the vast number of sins, thought, word, and deed, he has committed.

In this blindness there is no sin too great for the unchaste man to commit, if it is necessary to his ends; if it is required to make an enemy of his best friend, he does so; to trouble his brothers and sisters, he makes little scruple of that; to dishonor his father and mother, he does without hesitation; if he must keep up appearances by receiving the Sacraments sometimes, sacrilegious confessions, Communions, and Masses heard without profit, through want of true sorrow, are small matters to him. He has no respect for holy places consecrated to God, if he can there satisfy his lust by impure looks and desires. The blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle does not frighten him any more than if it were a dead thing; for in its very presence his heart is filled with filthy thoughts, and his eyes seek for new objects of gratification. Mention any of the greatest sins, such as murder, parricide, heresy, idolatry, which he is not ready to commit for the sake of his impure love.

King David, the holiest of men, imbrued his hands in the blood of Urias, his most faithful and innocent soldier, on account of an impure passion. King Solomon, whose wisdom the world wondered at, bent his knee

before idols of wood and stone and offered incense to them; to such a degree of folly was he brought by impurity. Tertullian says of him: "Solomon lost the glory that he had with God, by women who brought him into idolatry."

II. As the will cannot work unless the understanding goes before with its light and knowledge, it is evident that when the understanding is blinded to good, as is the case with those who are given to impurity, the will cannot be led on to good. There is a great difference between the maladies of the body and those of the soul; if I am attacked by a dangerous fever, I may be cured, although I know nothing of the nature of my illness; nay, even if through the violence of the disease I am utterly unconscious, it is enough if the doctor knows what to do to cure me. But if I am sick in the soul, that is, in the state of sin, it is not enough that God, the only Physician of souls, knows my miserable state and can cure it; I must first see the malice of my sin, and the misery of my condition, in order to help in the work of my cure by repentance and a purpose of amendment. But what hope of repentance can an unchaste man have? How can he have it, since he is so blinded that he does not even know the malice, misery and danger of his state, and therefore pays no attention to it?

Bad habits become a sort of necessity; but there is none that takes a quicker hold of the heart, strikes deeper root and lasts longer than impurity, when once one has become addicted to it. Have you never remarked what the ivy does to the oak? It first creeps over the outside of the bark, and as it gets stronger it grows into the oak and forms but one tree with it. Try now to separate them from each other, and you will find that you cannot tear down the ivy without bringing away the bark of the oak, and so killing it. So it is with carnal pleasures. The desires of them increase with continued indulgence until they become a second nature, so that it is easier to separate the soul from the body than to take them out of the heart. I know well that there is nothing impossible to the Almighty, but if anything were impossible to him it would be the conversion of one who is entangled in the meshes of an impure love; for what means could God use to bring him to true repentance, as long as he is in the occasion which foment his passion?

When Noe heard from God that the world was to be destroyed by a deluge, he did not have recourse to the divine mercy in prayer. Noe knew well that he was pleasing to God, and that his prayers would be heard; why, then, did he not try to avert such a terrible punishment from the human race? Could he not at least have asked God to mitigate it a little, and to destroy only some families? Certainly Moses acted quite differently when God in his anger threatened to destroy all the people of Israel, for he offered himself as a victim to appease the divine anger. Noe, on the contrary, never said a word to prevent the destruction of the whole world. This is the reason: The sin of the Israelites in the desert was idolatry, a far greater sin than impurity, but not so difficult to repent of and to avoid, and therefore, after the first promise on the part of Moses, idolatry disappeared. On the other hand, at the time of the deluge, the vice of impurity had gained the upper hand. Noe saw that there was no hope of repentance in such a case, and therefore he did not think it worth his while to pray. The event justified his anticipations, for we do not read of a single one being converted, in spite of the threatened punishment. Hence, all spiritual writers agree in saying that it requires a miracle of grace to make an unchaste man leave off his vicious habits and unlawful amours, and be really converted. Unhappy people, who are still living in sin, do not expect that God will give you a grace which he bestows upon hardly one in a hundred. Yet, what am I saying? You do not even wish for that grace! A physician once said to a sick man, who was asking him for something to allay his thirst: "Wait and I will give you what you want." "Good," said the sick man; "but I do not wish the thirst to be taken away altogether." He wished to feel a little thirsty, that he might have more pleasure in drinking. So it is with the impure; they do not wish to be freed from their desires, that they may have the pleasure of gratifying them.

A girl who lived in improper intimacy with her intended husband (unfortunately such sins are only too common before marriage), God in his mercy sent her a dangerous illness, in order to put a stop to her crime; the illness lasted some months, so that she had time to repent. She profited by the opportunity and often renewed her sorrow and detestation of her sins, with a firm purpose of amendment. At last she asked her confessor's leave to speak to her partner in guilt, and to warn him to repent, that he might not lose his soul. The priest incautiously consented, not suspecting any evil, and suggested to her what she should say to warn him; but hardly had she laid eyes on her lover when she forgot all she had intended to say: the old, impure flame burst forth anew, and she cried out with all the strength she had left: I have always loved you with my whole heart, and it is now that I can best prove my love for you; I know that I am to be damned for your sake, but no matter;

I am quite willing that it should be so. With these words she fell back exhausted and gave up her unhappy soul! The priest and the young man, who were standing by, were almost frightened out of their lives. Oh, desperate passion! “Oh, infernal flame of impure love!” which can hardly be extinguished until it is buried in the flames of hell. Amen.

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