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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 3 = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Duty of Fraternal Correction

“He went to Him, and prayed Him to come down and heal his son.” St John 4:47.

It is no wonder that this man was so anxious for the recovery of the sick person, who was his own son; but why did he come himself? For he was a great man, a ruler, and could have sent one of his servants to our Lord to ask Him to heal his son? But no, he was not satisfied unless he came Himself, for his fatherly love would not let him rest otherwise. And according to his wish and desire he heard from our Lord the consoling words: “Go thy way, thy son liveth.” I have already begun to speak of fraternal correction, by which the souls of our fellow men, sick and dying through sin, can be saved from death and restored to health. I have shown how that correction is required of us by the love of God and the love of our neighbor. But unfortunately in this matter we are as if we were dumb, or as if our neighbor’s welfare did not concern us. Yet it does concern us, and we are bound to further it under pain of sin, as I shall now show.

I. *Many are bound by justice under pain of sin to fraternal correction.*

II. *All are bound to it occasionally by a special law of God.*

I. Everyone is bound in justice to keep to the terms of the contract he has made. Thus, if I were surety for your debtor, I should be bound to do my best to enable you to have the money that is due to you. A steward or servant who has agreed with you for a yearly wage is bound to look after your property and your house, and justice requires him to take all possible care to make your property as profitable as possible and prevent it from being injured by theft or otherwise. He who has undertaken to keep your money, or money’s worth, safe for you, is bound to do all he can to prevent it from being lost.

Now, there are many men in the world who, by virtue of their office or position, have entered on a tacit agreement with God by which they bind themselves to look after the welfare of certain souls as best they can, in order to prevent them from being lost forever. Who are they? All superiors, whether lay or ecclesiastical, who have to protect the interests of their subjects in towns or villages: such as parish priests and those who have a care of souls with regard to their parishioners; teachers with regard to their pupils; parents with regard to their sons and daughters masters and mistresses with regard to their servants and other domestics; husbands with regard to their wives; in a word, all those who have any position of superiority or authority over others. When entering on their state or occupation they made a tacit contract with God by which they took upon themselves the care of their subjects, as sureties, stewards, and depositaries of God, binding themselves thereby to use all possible diligence to lead on their subjects to good, to keep them from evil, and to induce them to amend their lives if they are in sin.

Therefore they are bound in justice not only to admonish, warn, and exhort in a fatherly manner those subjects of theirs whom they see to be in sin or in the danger of sin, but also to reprove and punish them if warnings or threats have proved unavailing; so that they who are careless or forgetful of this duty are guilty of all the sins

and vices that they failed to correct and prevent in their subjects. We are just as guilty as if we ourselves committed the sinful act; for he who does not correct what should be corrected is guilty of the sin. And God will one day require the souls of those subjects at our hands, as He Himself says: "At the hand of man, at the hand of every man, and of his brother will I require the life of man" (Gen. 9:5).

And this is perfectly just; for it is a recognized practice even in worldly concerns. If your debtor has run through his property, and has become unable to pay what he owes you, you look to the person who went surety for him, to see that you get what you have a right to; nor can the latter shirk the obligation, for he should have looked better after the man for whom he went surety, and not suffered him to live so extravagantly. If the money you have deposited with another is stolen, or the property you have left in his care injured, then he who undertook the care of it is bound to make restitution to you out of his own goods, if the theft can be traced to any willful and gross carelessness on his part. Why so? He has not stolen your property, nor received a single penny of your money. No matter; he was not diligent in keeping it, as he was bound to be by the contract he entered into; and on account of this carelessness he is bound in conscience to indemnify you out of his own goods. In your absence you have entrusted your house and shop to your Servant; the Servant finds a comfortable seat, and goes to sleep with the door open, so that thieves get into your shop and run off with what they can lay hands on. What will you say to that when you come back? What will you think of your servant when you find out how he has looked after your property? It does not take you long to consider about that! You worthless fellow! you say to him; make good what was lost through your laziness, or else you will soon become acquainted with the inside of a prison, to teach you, and all like you, how to mind your business. But why are you so strict with the poor man? Is that right on your part? What harm has he done? He only fell asleep, and there is surely no great harm in that?

Yes, you answer; but he should have looked after my house and property better I hired him for that purpose; and therefore he should either have shut the door or else kept his eyes open; his going to sleep was the cause of the robbery; therefore he must either pay me or go to prison. And you are perfectly right, nor can any one find fault with your mode of acting under the circumstances.

Suppose that you are well off, and that you undertake to be surety with a man for his debtor. While you are signing the agreement, oh, how friendly the man is to you! He is as polite and cordial as if you were his dearest friend. But wait a little; when the time has elapsed, and the debtor is unable to meet his obligation; what then? Oh, then the creditor acts quite differently; he sends word to you at once, and lets you know that you have to pay. The time is up, he says; you went bail for that man; give me now what he owes me. And if you do not pay immediately he sends the officers of justice to your house to take possession of your property, and tries by every means to compel you to pay the debt. Why has he changed so suddenly in your regard? At first he was quite friendly to you; he spoke kindly and was most cordial. Yes, but then he is not now; things are seen in a different light now that the time for payment has come. He is quite a stranger to you; he knows you no longer, unless in so far as he is determined to exact his own from you to the last farthing. So will Christ act with those who by their state or office have charge of the souls of others. Christ is called a stranger, because although he is a friend at the time of the agreement, when one undertakes the charge of the souls of others, "He is a stranger when the day of reckoning comes," if the duty has not been properly performed. Therefore, "my son, if thou be surety" waken up the souls entrusted to you; admonish, reprove them if they have done evil or are in danger. Do not go asleep over your weighty charge, be not negligent save them from the danger, that you may not have to pay for them one day with your own soul.

But alas, how few care about this! How carelessly most people perform their duty in this respect! How many there are who go to sleep, and let thieves enter into the house of God, and have neither eyes to watch over the souls entrusted to them, nor tongues to warn them, nor hands to punish them when necessary? Public abuses, scandals, sins, and vices, are sometimes allowed loose rein in a community, and thereby many souls are betrayed and ruined; while those who could and ought to speak in order to prevent the mischief have not courage to open their mouths: they act as if they were asleep, and allow the temples of God, precious souls, to be robbed and plundered.

Alas, how will they fare when Christ will appear to them as a stranger, and demand an account of the souls that they thus allowed to slip through their hands? To no purpose will they try to excuse themselves by saying: but I have done no harm; I did not lead those under my care into the vices to which they abandoned themselves;

I did not tell my servants to swear, or curse, or not to go to church, or to frequent bad company, or to cultivate dangerous intimacies; I did not advise my children to lead idle, useless lives; nor was I pleased to see my wife neglecting her house duties, and squandering our income so foolishly. I neither taught them those evil habits nor did I give them bad example; how, then, can I be accountable for their sins? Ah, that you will soon see! Neither did that surety tell the debtor to squander away his property; he would far rather have seen him able to pay what he owed. The servant who went asleep in the shop did not invite the thief to come in, nor did he show him the goods or ask him to steal them; he would have been far better pleased if the thief had remained away altogether. But he slept when he should have remained awake; and that alone is enough reason for having him punished.

All those who have charge of the souls of others, especially masters and parents, need of a certainty commit no other sin to lose their own souls than that neglect of paternal vigilance and correction. A good thing for me, perhaps some one will now say, that I am not a superior, or pastor of souls, or preacher, or master, or father, or mother; I have only myself to look after and be responsible for; so that I am free from that duty and need not trouble about rendering any account for not having admonished or corrected others. True, you are not so strictly bound in justice as those others are; yet do not be in too great a hurry to conclude that you are free from every obligation in that respect. Whoever you may be, you are bound under sin according to your ability and opportunity, to fraternal correction by a special law of God, which he has imposed on all men.

II. It is certain and undoubted that it is the will of God that all sins and vices should be corrected and reproved, in whatever manner it may be done. Now, superiors, parents, and pastors of souls have authority in this way over their own subjects alone, and not over others; neither can they know everything nor find out always where sin is committed. There are millions of sins committed behind their backs that they can know nothing about, and therefore cannot prevent by correction. Hence it is clearly the will of God that all men should perform this duty with regard to each other, and try to help one another to the best of their ability to avoid sin and to amend their lives. Such is the meaning of the words: "He gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor" (Ecclus. 17:12). "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and thou shalt say to them thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; but reprove him openly, lest thou incur sin through him" (Levit. 29:2, 17). "Reprove a friend, lest he may not have understood, and say, I did it not; or if he did it, that he may do it no more. Admonish thy friend, for there is often a fault committed. Admonish thy neighbor before thou threaten him, and give place to the fear of the Most High" (Ecclus. 19:13 - 18).

Christ expressly commands us: "If thy brother sin against thee, reprove him" (St. Luke 17:3). That is, if he sins to thy knowledge, or in thy presence, reprove him. "If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother; and if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more. And if he will not hear them, tell the Church" (St. Matthew 18:15, 17). If he will not hear you, tell those who have more authority over him. Hence we are bound to practice fraternal correction, not by a mere counsel, but by a law which obliges us under sin; and he who does not try to correct his neighbor whom he sees doing wrong becomes a participator in his guilt. **He who can correct and neglects doing so, certainly participates in the sin.**

Now come forward all you who, when there is question of fraternal correction, have in your hearts or on your lips the words of Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9.) What have I to do with others? I have to look out for myself; it is my own soul that I must try to bring to heaven; let others try to do the same for themselves; let each one bear his own burthen and account for his own actions; I have enough to do to mind myself, and I find so many faults and failings in myself that I have neither time nor inclination to trouble myself about those of others. What is it to me? Ah, fine talk that! What a pity you do not speak and think in that way when you indulge your curiosity about the actions of others, and by rash judgments and unfounded suspicions put the worst construction on them! What is it to me? I have to look out for my own soul. So should you think and say when you backbite your neighbor, or listen eagerly to uncharitable conversation; when you talk about faults that you merely suspect in him, or make his secret faults the subject of ridicule and laughter, causing them to appear much worse than they are in reality. What is it to me? What have I to do with others? So should you think and say when you speak of the known sins of your neighbor to those who cannot correct him, and do that through hatred, dislike, vindictiveness, because he has done you some injury, or out of mere talkativeness. That would be the time for you to say: what is it to me? I have nothing to do with others, I must look after myself and my own soul. Fraternal correction does not require such spying, detraction, talking, and fault-finding. No; such

prying and idle talk does not prevent sin, but rather increases it; it does not gain the souls of our brethren, but rather takes away their good name and reputation. But when opportunity offers to give your neighbor a wholesome admonition, when you see or know of him doing wrong, to warn him charitably, to keep him away from evil, and give him a mild reproof if you reasonably hope that it will do him good, that is what concerns you and all men, and what the express laws of God, and the good of souls require.

Therefore if your brother sins, go and rebuke him. Each one will find opportunities enough of doing this, provided he wishes to help his neighbor to amend. Remember how often you have given others scandal and been the occasion of sin to them, thus helping in the ruin of souls. That consideration alone should be sufficient to induce you to be all the more zealous in atoning for the harm you have done and in gaining new souls to God. Consider the example of St. Paul. After his conversion he hardly took time to refresh his body, emaciated as it was by a three days' fast, but at once set about the work of converting sinners to Christ he who before was a persecutor, as soon as he became a Christian himself, began without delay to induce others to follow his example: "And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the son of God" (Acts 9:20). We have another example in David. When he had repented of his sins his first resolution was to become a teacher and an apostle, to warn others, from following the broad road of vice, and to lead them to God:

"I will teach the unjust thy ways; and the wicked shall be converted to thee" (Ps. 1:15). This was what our Lord said to St. Peter, after having foretold his lamentable fall: "And thou being once converted, confirm thy brethren" (St. Luke 22:32). His meaning was: thou wilt indeed rise after thy fall; but remember, at the same time, that thou art bound to help thy brethren, and to sustain them by word and example. Follow these examples, and you will atone to God for your former faults. Amen.

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