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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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TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Unreasonableness of Giving Way to Anger
and the Best Means of Controlling It

“And his Lord was angry.” St. Matt. 18:34

This Lord had good reason to be angry with his wicked servant, who, although he was forgiven the enormous debt of ten thousand talents, yet acted so harshly with his fellow-servant, who owed him but a hundred pence, and who begged him in the most humble manner to have patience with him, that he had him cast into prison for the trifling debt. How often do not Christians give way to anger and resentment against their fellow-men, without the least cause, and without having ever suffered anything at their hands? How many are there who, when things do not go according to their wishes, at once give expression to the bitterest feelings against those whom they suspect to be the cause of their failure! Woe to such people, if the Almighty were to deal in a similar manner with them every time they offended him by sin, which they do daily! For, as our Lord says in today's Gospel: “So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.” If that threat is uttered against all who refuse to forgive those who have injured them, what will they have to expect who give way to anger against their neighbor on the least provocation, and make use of injurious and insulting words toward him? I will speak of this anger, which

I. Is a vice contrary to sound reason.

II. How we may and must control and repress the movements of anger as well in ourselves as in others.

I. The Lacedaemonians, in order to deter their children from the abominable vice of drunkenness, used to make their slaves drunk and bring their children in to see them in that state. Their disgusting appearance, their unbecoming gestures, their uncertain gait, their incoherent speech, and the other effects of intoxication that were observable in them, made the children look on them as a strange kind of wild animal. Thus from their very childhood the Lacedaemonians were filled with horror for a vice so unbecoming a reasoning being. In the same way, in order to see how anger is opposed to reason, we need only look at an angry man giving vent to his feelings. See how disturbed he looks; with his face alternately red and pale with passion, his eyes darting forth fire, his teeth grinding with rage, his lips compressed, his whole body trembling, his fist clenched, his tongue full of gall. Would not one have reason to think that he is completely mad and out of his mind, or else that he has been transformed into a wild beast? In fact, he is called a fool by the Holy Ghost in the Book of Ecclesiastes: “Be not quickly angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of a fool;” and a savage and unreasoning beast, in the Book of Proverbs: “As the roaring of a lion, so is the anger of a king.” Anger is a short-lived madness.

The cause of his anger is generally some worthless thing. Consider the anger and resentment of Achab; one would think that some terrible misfortune had befallen him; he became melancholy and refused to leave his bed; he would not touch food or drink, and did nothing but look at the bare wall. And why was he so distressed and disturbed? A rude answer was the only cause of his bitterness. Achab wished to purchase a certain vineyard; he sent for the owner, Naboth, and asked him to exchange it with him. Naboth, instead of excusing himself in a polite manner, answered gruffly: “The Lord be merciful to me, and not let me give thee the inheritance of my fathers” (3 Kings 21:3, 4). “And Achab came into the house angry and fretting, because of the word that Naboth had spoken to him.” He was not angry because of the deed, but because of the word. What great power a little word has on a passionate disposition! Was it worth while to get so angry for such a trifle, to throw himself on his bed and refuse to eat or drink? Seneca writes that Vedius Pollio once condemned a slave to be thrown into a fish-pond for having broken a glass vessel while waiting at table. Fortunately for the slave the Emperor Augustus was present, and he was so disgusted at the cruel sentence that he had the slave set free and ordered every glass vessel in Pollio’s house to be broken, so that the latter might not have so many opportunities of giving way to anger, and of sacrificing human life for the sake of a broken glass.

For what worthless things an irascible and ill-tempered man gives way to his passion when he does not know how to control its first movements. The least fault committed by one who is living in the same house, the silence of one, the loquacity of another, a thoughtless word, a well-meant contradiction on the part of his wife, the crying of his innocent children, the slowness, or precipitation, or awkwardness of his servants, nay, even his own faults, stir up his ill-humor and make him fill the whole house with confusion and discord. Even things that it is out of our power to improve or change, such as inclement weather, a harsh wind, a difficulty in some work or other, a stubborn horse, a howling dog, an ill-tuned instrument, a blunt knife, a bad pen, a cup or glass broken by accident or even by his own fault, and a thousand other similar trifles are capable of making him quite beside himself with anger; so that he begins to curse and swear, and gets in a great passion. Now, is that the way in which a sensible man should act? Are such things to be deemed a sufficient cause for losing one’s temper and often disturbing the whole family?

Oh, some will say, it is easy to call these things trifles; you do not know how things go in our house; I should have as little feeling as a stone if I were to pass them over in silence. When my drunken husband comes home the worse for drink, have I not reason to be angry? When my good-for-nothing, fault-finding wife criticizes everything I do, how can I keep my temper? Must I not get angry if my servants do not do what I tell them? Have I not reason to be displeased when I see my children running about the house and doing what they like? When I meet that troublesome neighbor of mine, with whom I have a lawsuit, I should have the patience of Job to be able to control myself. If others did not interfere with me I should be all right; but as things are, I cannot keep my temper. Ah, my dear Christian, you are making a great mistake and deceiving yourself! It is not your husband, nor your wife, nor any one else that is the cause of your giving way to anger: you yourself are to blame especially. Your over-sensitiveness, which does not allow you to bear the least annoyance from others; your obstinacy, which makes you try to have everything according to your own ideas; your imagination, which makes a mountain out of a mole-hill; your suspicious character, which you neither mortify nor restrain; the bad habit you have so long indulged in of giving way to anger at the least provocation; these are the real causes of your ill-humor and anger. If you had learned a little Christian patience and meekness, you would not be at all disturbed by hundreds of such trifles, or, at all events, you would not give such violent and unreasonable expression to your feelings.

And what does the passionate man gain by giving way to his temper? Nothing, but that he makes his temper worse and more difficult to be controlled, causes himself a great deal of pain and annoyance by imagining that people are treating him unjustly, injures his health and shortens his life; for, according to what physicians say, there is nothing more injurious to health than to give way to anger; and to make himself hateful to the members of his own family and contemptible to all sensible men.

But what should most of all deter one from anger is the fact that thereby God is offended, and his wrath and malediction are incurred on account of the many sins against Christian charity that arise from it. For that unnatural cursing, swearing, and abusive language, quarrelling and fighting, long-continued hatred and enmity, discord and strife, vindictiveness, and sometimes even murder—nay, even blasphemy against the Most High—are all children of anger, and God will not allow them to go unpunished. Therefore, in order to preserve us from

those sins, our Lord pronounces this sentence against anger, in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment;" but he who through deliberate anger shall say: "Thou fool! Shall be in danger of hell fire." Therefore, let us do all in our power to avoid such a detestable vice, which is contrary to reason and is the cause of so many sins. "Let all bitterness and anger, and indignation and clamor, and blasphemy, be put away from you, with all malice." But what are we to do in order to check this evil inclination, to which we are all subject?

II. To avoid all anger, two things have to be observed, one by those who have to deal with passionate people, the other by those who are easily excited to anger. The former must be very careful to give the latter no cause for offence, once they know them to be easily excited; they must never dispute with, or contradict them, and they must avoid everything which they know to be a likely cause of anger to them; besides, they must bear with any annoyance which the others cause them, in a spirit of meekness and patience, for God's sake, in order to preserve peace and quiet. But if it is quite evident that the other is determined on getting into a passion, then there is nothing to do but to follow the advice of St. Paul: "Give place to wrath;" that is, let the angry man have his way; keep silent, and let him say and do what he will until his anger is over; go out of his way, out of his sight if possible; do not attempt to excuse yourself, although you are innocent; apologize to him as if he had reason to be vexed with you. This meekness will overcome his anger, and when he comes to himself it will make him admire your virtue, acknowledge his own fault, feel ashamed of himself, and have a greater esteem and love for you. In a word, if there is no one to contradict, there is no occasion for anger and bad temper.

Oh, if all married people especially, understood this beautiful art and constantly practiced it toward each other, what quarrels and discord and misunderstandings, along with the numerous sins that spring from them, would be avoided in families! But, alas! They do not understand it, and therefore neither will give way, neither will remain silent; both strive to have the last word, and of course thus they give rise to the bitterest family quarrels! They are like that married couple who always disagreed on a certain day every year; and do you know why? They once had some roast fowl for dinner, and they differed in opinion as to what kind of birds they were. The husband said they were blackbirds, the wife maintained that they were fieldfares; they had a great dispute about the matter, and at last came to blows. Next year, when the same day came round, the husband said to his wife: Do you remember how foolish we were last year, to fight about the blackbirds? Yes, answered she, and it was your fault; they were fieldfares, not blackbirds. And so they began the dispute again as bad as ever, and repeated it every year when the day came. But do not people act just as foolishly nowadays in many households? One contradicts the other, and neither will give way, in matters that are not of the least importance, and thus discord and hatred arise, and married life is turned into a regular purgatory, to be followed very often by the eternal pains of hell!

If you find that something suddenly occurs to provoke you to anger, go away, so as not to see it. If you cannot go away, nor otherwise avoid the annoyance, keep perfectly still; do not speak a word; undertake nothing, make no resolution, until your resentment has subsided, because you cannot act prudently while your reason is disturbed by passion. Such was the advice that a certain philosopher gave the emperor Augustus: Whenever you feel inclined to anger, he said, you must repeat the letters of the alphabet from beginning to end, over and over again, until your anger has passed; in that way you will neither do nor say anything that you will have to repent of afterwards. The emperor Theodosius, acting on the advice of St. Ambrose, published a law forbidding any malefactor condemned to death to be executed until thirty days had elapsed after the sentence was pronounced against him. The pious emperor knew well that it would be unjust not to give a poor wretch who was condemned to death by an enraged sovereign any respite until the latter's anger had passed over. It was a remarkable saying that Architas made use of when he returned home from a foreign country and found, that his steward had allowed his property to go to ruin: If I were not angry, said he to the careless steward, I should punish you severely. And in acting thus he showed great wisdom, although he was a heathen, for he knew that while his reason was disturbed by anger he could not inflict just punishment. Christian parents and married people, you should profit by this example. You are bound to chastise your children when they deserve it.

I conclude with the words of David: "Be ye angry and sin not." Be angry and displeased when God is offended, and, if you can, chastise and prevent the sins of others. But if a man has to suffer anything from his neighbor, he must practice charity, patience and meekness. Always remember who it is that causes you annoyance or insults you. Is he a child? Then you must have pity on his youth. He does not know that he is

doing wrong. Is it a grown-up person whom you have offended? Why should you be angry with him? You offended him first. Is it some one who insults you through sheer malice? Then you must not be surprised at what he does, nor must you be angry with him, for he has already punished himself by being so wicked. No matter who has injured you, you should not forget that he is your neighbor, that you are bound to love him as yourself, and to return good for evil. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2); such is the advice that St. Paul gives us, and according to it we must overlook each other's faults and failings. There is no one without faults which sometimes make him troublesome to others, yet these latter must bear those faults with patience. If then, you are offended, you must think to yourself: I have offended others or there is something in me which is displeasing to them; they must be patient with me, and of course I must be patient with them. "In your patience you shall possess your souls" (Luke 2:19), says Christ. How patient one is with a querulous old man, or a troublesome sick person, or an eccentric and headstrong relative, when he hopes to inherit a large sum of money from him!

Always keep before your eyes our Lord, Jesus Christ. How gentle and patient he was with his disciples while they were still very ignorant! How gentle and patient he was with the greatest sinners! How gentle and patient he was toward those who mocked, scourged, and crucified him! "Who, when he was reviled, did not revile; when he suffered he threatened not, but delivered himself to him that judged him unjustly." "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart." If these words do not help you to restrain your anger, what can do it? Amen.

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