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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

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Wickedness of Those Who Sin in the Hope of Being Forgiven in Confession

“And his Lord being angry delivered him to the torturers.” St. Matt. 18:34.

This parable represents in a striking manner what has often taken place, and what still takes place between God and the sinner. In it you have a symbol, first, of the infinite goodness of God towards the repenting sinner, and second, of the inconceivable ingratitude of many sinners, who abuse and outrage the goodness and mercy of God, and who continually alternate between confession and sin, sin and confession, profaning the holy Sacrament of Penance by their wicked lives. Against those sinners, I direct my words today; and I tell them beforehand that they are in the greatest and most evident danger of eternal damnation,

I. Because they will never be really converted to God; and

II. Because God will hardly ever give them the grace of true repentance.

He who does not understand his business will not perform it rightly. So, also, he who does not understand what is necessary for true repentance, will never be really converted to God, nor obtain forgiveness of his sins. Presumptuous man, who fall into grievous sin without scruple or shame, flattering yourself that it does not make much matter, so that you confess it afterwards, learn that the declaration of one's sins to the priest in confession is the least of the things required for true repentance. That which is most necessary for the true conversion of a sinner is contrition for his sins; that sorrow must be (1) sincere and interior, (2) supernatural, (3) universal, and (4) sovereign. It must include, also, a firm purpose of the will rather to die than to offend God again by one mortal sin. Do you understand this?

1. In the first place, do you believe that such a sorrow is required for the validity of your confession? If so, you act against all the laws of common sense, and are utterly incapable of true contrition when you say to yourself, I will commit this sin, or I will continue committing it, because I can confess and repent of it afterwards. Who ever heard a man say: “I will throw myself down from the top of this wall and break my arms and legs; but afterwards I will be sorry for my folly, and will condemn it with bitter tears, and will send for an experienced doctor to heal my wounds?” Or: “I will set fire to my house, but will regret afterwards that I have done so, and, with great expense, will build a new one.” Or, again: “I will marry that notoriously wicked woman, and afterwards, will wish sincerely that I had never seen her!” Would not such a man be regarded as a fool or a madman? But such and even greater is the folly you are guilty of, when you commit mortal sin, because you think that you will afterwards be able to repent of and confess it.

2. Further, considering your mode of action, are you able to awaken the true sorrow and repentance required by God, or will you be able to awaken it later on? What will be your motives? What have they been hitherto? It

is well known that contrition for sin is twofold, namely, perfect and imperfect. Perfect contrition comes from a perfect love of God, arising from the knowledge given us by faith that God is of, and in, himself, the infinite and supreme Good, and of himself, is worthy of infinite love and esteem. Therefore, it grieves us above all things that we have offended such a God who is worthy of all love. Imperfect sorrow arises either from the fear of God's justice and the dread of hell-fire; from the recollection of God's many benefits, and the consideration of the loss of heaven; or else it arises from a reflection on the deformity of sin. None of these motives is capable of exciting you to a true sorrow for and detestation of your sins. You neither love nor fear God sincerely; nor do you acknowledge the benefits you have received from him. You do not value the joys of heaven, nor entertain a real horror of sin. So that there is no motive capable of arousing in you a true sorrow, and since you go on from one confession to another, saying, I will commit this sin, and confess it afterwards, you are hardly ever capable of having a real sorrow and of being truly converted to God. But suppose your presumptuous hope is realized (for the human will may change at any moment); suppose that, moved by some special light to a real love or fear of God, you repent of your sins, and make a good confession, how long will your conversion last?

Rash man, who have continued heaping sin on sin, depending on the chance of making a good confession, how will you be able to resist to the end the effects of inveterate habit, and those inclinations which, being already implanted in your nature, have acquired additional violence by long indulgence; how will you be able to resist them, even supposing that you are truly converted and make a good confession? How can you promise yourself a victory over them, after having made a second nature out of your evil habits? How will you be able to vanquish them, when the devil comes with his suggestions and temptations, strengthening your natural inclinations to sin? The oftener you have allowed yourself to be overcome by the devil, the more are you enslaved by him, the stronger the dominion he has over you and your evil desires; and what will be the terrible consequences? I will commit sin, you say to yourself, and afterwards I will repent of and confess it; or, I will gratify my passions this once, and then one confession will make it all right. Ah! All that is nothing but a deceit of the devil! Do not trust him! The crafty tempter acts like a general who, having obtained permission to pass through the enemy's country with one or two companies of soldiers, promising to remain but a day or two, as soon as he has effected an entry, fortifies himself and is not easily dislodged. So the devil, our sworn enemy, seems to be satisfied, in the beginning, if we grant him simply a right of way. He suggests to a man that he ought to try this pleasure; he can repent of it afterwards; and if the suggestion is acted on, he persuades his victim to try the same pleasure once more, trusting again in a future confession. But you must be on your guard, or else he will bring matters so far with his suggestions that, keeping fast hold of you as his bond-slave, he will at last cause you to die impenitent, so that all the confessions you have made, and all time penance you intended doing, will be of no avail to you.

II. God does not give the grace of true repentance to the presumptuous sinner.

Man, by his own unassisted strength, can do no supernaturally good work. Much less can he free himself from the state of sin, repent of his evil deeds, and do penance as he ought, unless God helps him by his preventing and co-operating grace. This extraordinary grace God is not bound to give to any willfully grievous sinner. Furthermore, he can withdraw all other graces and helps as he pleases, so that the sinner, according to his deserts, must necessarily be lost forever. Moreover, the greater the malice and number of sins that one has committed, and the more inveterate his habits of sinning, so also the greater, more powerful, and extraordinary must be the helps and graces he receives from God in order to be converted. Consequently the less, too, is God obliged to help him in such a special manner. Do you understand this clearly, presumptuous man, when you sin without scruple, and heap sin on sin, trusting to a future confession? How can you reasonably hope that God will give you such a special grace of repentance, I do not say every time you go to confession but at any time at all? No, that is not likely; for, you neither deserve that grace, nor is it becoming for God to give it you.

1. You do not deserve that grace. It is generally acknowledged amongst men of the world that he who is ungrateful to his benefactor deserves to be deprived of the benefits he has received; and much more so, if he has misused those benefits to insult and injure his benefactor. The Sacrament of Penance is founded on the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is instituted as a special benefit and a necessary help for us poor, frail mortals, since by

its means, if we commit a mortal sin, we can free ourselves from it, and more easily avoid a relapse. But you, o sinner! Abuse this very benefit as a reason and a means of sinning all the more shamelessly against God. For, if there was no confession, if you knew for certain that, should you commit a grievous sin, there is no means of freeing your conscience from it, you would surely be more on your guard against mortal sin, and would not allow yourself to be so easily overcome by temptation. Since, however, the good and merciful God has appointed this easy means of procuring pardon, you contemn him without scruple, and add sin to sin. "I will commit sin," you think, "because I can tell it in confession afterwards." That is to say: "I will offend my God, because he has given me a means of freeing myself from the state of sin! I will offend my God, because he will forgive me afterwards." In a word, your meaning is: I will despise my God, and defy him, because being so good and merciful, he will afterwards receive me into his grace and friendship. Is not that abusing a benefit to insult the Benefactor?

2. But you expect an extraordinary grace from your outraged God: On what do you ground your presumptuous hope? The holiest Saints were often obliged to beg for years and years before obtaining certain favors from him. St. Paul, a chosen vessel of election, prayed, while constantly chastising and mortifying his body, for the grace to be freed from the assaults of the flesh; and yet, as he himself acknowledges, he did not receive it. Pious souls, who seek for nothing in the world but to please God more and more, and to fulfill his holy will in all things, how long have they not to pray, sometimes for a certain virtue, such as angelic purity, patience under adversity, love of crosses and humiliations, before they obtain from God the favor they long for so earnestly? And you, after having so long abused the benefits of God, and profaned the holy Sacrament of Penance, you are not afraid to promise yourself that you will obtain a far greater favor, namely, the grace of true repentance, whenever you may be pleased to accept it! God must be ready at your nod and beck, to prepare for you a grace that he is bound to give to no man who has sinned mortally even once, and through frailty! No! No! Pearls are not to be cast before swine in that way! True, the mercy of God in receiving sinners is exceedingly great; but he has not entrusted it to any one to do with it what he likes, as you seem to be presumptuous enough to imagine. You act as if you had a document in your possession assuring you of the grace of conversion whenever you are willing to claim it. But that is not the case: "I will have mercy on whom I will," said God to Moses, "and I will be merciful to whom it shall please me" (Exod. 33:19). To you, I say, he will not at all times give the grace of true repentance, since you make a bad use of it to commit sin; nay, he cannot, so to speak, give it to you, as a general rule, for that would not be becoming him.

It is a consoling truth, that his goodness and mercy are limitless and endless, that the treasures of his grace are inexhaustible; but it is also infallibly certain, that he dispenses his favors with the greatest judgment, as becomes such a just and wise Lord; and that he always acts with a view to his own honor and glory, that men may praise and magnify him all the more. He justly desires, that his benefits should be recognized and prized. For this reason, he often refuses for a long time to grant the favor asked of him by his holiest servants, in order that, when received at last, they may value them the more; for what is easily gotten, generally speaking, is little valued. He has decreed an eternal punishment for every mortal sin, so that the fear of hell may act as a check on men, to keep them from offending him, and to make them faithful in his service. Now, all this would go for nothing, if God, as a general rule, were to give the grace of true repentance to those who go on sinning in the hope of confessing their sins afterwards. Would he not seem to expose himself and his honor to mockery and contempt in his own world? Who would value the grace of repentance, if it were to be had whenever one wishes it, even after it had been shamefully abused! Who would fear the fire of hell, if every sinner were free to say: "Hell is not for me. I can sin as much as I please, and tomorrow, or the next day, I shall confess my sins, and all will be well with me!"

Such a state of things would confirm the impious in their wicked lives, and would lead infidels to mock and despise God! What scandal would be given the innocent! What cause for murmurs and complaints to the good and righteous, seeing that the pearl of God's kingdom is cast before swine, that is, offered at a cheap price to reckless and presumptuous sinners, while they themselves have to work out their salvation in fear and trembling, and amid continual labors and trials! "Be not deceived," is the warning given by St. Paul, "God it not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap" (Gal. 6:7, 8). If you sinned long and grievously against the divine commands, there is still hope for you; only return with confidence; repent

sincerely and confess your sins. Our merciful God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. But to rely on this confession, on this long-suffering mercy of God, in order to sin all the more boldly, because there is such an easy means at hand as the Sacrament of Penance, and God is always ready to forgive the sinner, that, I say, is a presumption abominable in the sight of the God of justice and all holiness.

Dogs, when they find the door open in the morning, run out at once; they play, and jump about, and fight with each other, and carry on their games all over the town, till evening. Sometimes, indeed, they come home, when they find the door open and see the table laid; but, as soon as they have swallowed a mouthful, they are away again, until nightfall, when they return; and if they happen to find the door closed, they bark and howl their loudest in order to get admittance. But their master is too sensible to pay any attention to the noise they make. He lets them howl away until they are tired, so that they have to suffer the pangs of hunger all night on the doorstep. "They shall suffer hunger like dogs." There you have a picture of the unhappy state of those sinners of whom I am speaking. They see the door of God's mercy open for them in the holy Sacrament of Penance; but what do they do? They run about wildly all the days of their lives, falling from one sin into another. Sometimes, it is true, they come back and confess their sins, but after confession, they continue their wicked lives as before. "They shall return at evening;" when the day is past, and the night of death is drawing nigh; but then, "they shall suffer hunger like dogs." They shall fare like the foolish virgins, who wished to return to the marriage feast after having purchased oil for their lamps. The door of grace is closed against them. "Lord, Lord, open to us" (Matt. 25: 11), they exclaimed; but the only answer they got was, "I know you not."

"Be not deceived: God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also, shall reap corruption; but he that soweth in the Spirit, of the Spirit shall reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7, 8). Amen.

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