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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 + + +

*VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN*

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Injury Done One's Self and God by Finding Fault

*"Thou dost not regard the person of men."* St. Matt. 22:16

What a beautiful encomium that the Scribes and Pharisees passed on our Lord, but how crafty and treacherous was their motive! They thought they would be able to lead our Lord astray, so that to please them he would say that taxes should not be paid to the emperor, and then they could have cried him down as a disturber of the people and a rebel. That was their object in flattering him; "Master," they said, "we know that thou art a true speaker, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man;" thou fearest neither the enmity of Herod, nor the power of the emperor; "for thou dost not regard the person of men." But with all their cunning they did not succeed, and they had to retire in confusion. Would to God that this praise, which undeniably belongs to our divine Lord, could be given with truth to all men nowadays; so that we could say of every one: "Thou dost not regard the person of men!" But what did they say behind his back? And what do you do? You are friendly to the face of others, but fond of prying into the lives of others; without sufficient grounds you respect and condemn your neighbor. You are fond of speaking of the faults and failings of others, and therefore, by thus interfering with the affairs of others, you act against the love of yourself and the love of God.

*I. By thus interfering with the affairs of other which do not concern us, we neglect our own souls, and therefore act against the love we owe ourselves.*

*II. We usurp the right and office of God, and therefore act against the love we owe him.*

I. The chief duty that God has imposed on each one of us during this life is to love and serve God, and to be happy with him forever. This is the one necessary thing by which, as Ecclesiastes says, a wise man may be known: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is all man." This is the only affair that concerns every one in particular. This is what we must unceasingly attend to at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. This is the only thing about which each one will be questioned at the judgment-seat of God, as to whether and how he attended to it. "For," as St. Paul says, "we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Therefore every one of us shall render account to God for himself." Whether another, who is not under my care, has lived well or ill, served his God faithfully or not, that I shall not have to answer for; but I shall certainly be asked how I lived myself, and how I loved and served my God. Where the soul of my brother is gone, unless I have perverted it and am bound to convert it, that is not the question that will be put to me; if it is

lost it will not hinder my salvation; if it is in heaven, it will not prevent my damnation if I deserve it. It is the eternal welfare of my own soul that I must look after; this is the most important and necessary thing that I have to attend to as long as I am on this earth. All other things in the world do not concern me.

And, oh, inquisitive, meddling man, this one necessary thing is the very one that you neglect, when you meddle with the affairs of other people, whom God has not committed to your care. For, while you are engaged in prying into their lives and actions, how can you keep a watchful eye over yourself, so as to regulate your own conduct? As the ancients used to say, they carry a sack over their shoulders, in the front part of which they have the faults and sins of their neighbor, so that they can always keep them before their eyes and criticize them; but in the back part they have their own faults and sins, so that they cannot see, feel, or notice them, and therefore cannot correct them. "Why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? Or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye, and behold a beam is in thy own eye?" "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. 7:3-5). Why should it concern you to know and be able to speak of how others live? Have you to answer to God for them? Is there, perhaps, nothing in your own heart and conscience that is worth thinking about and amending? Can you say with St. Paul: "I am not conscious to myself of anything"? It would be rare indeed to find one who could say that. But hear what the Apostle adds: "Yet am I not hereby justified." If the Pharisee, who extolled himself in the temple so much above other men, had looked into his own heart and seen the secret pride and hypocrisy that filled it, he would not have despised nor condemned as a robber and adulterer the public sinner who, filled with humility and sorrow for his sins, stood at the door, and did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven. If the Jews had considered their own sins and vices, which Christ wrote with his finger on the ground, they would not have dared to accuse the woman taken in adultery, nor to condemn her to be stoned. In the same way, if each one of us were to attend properly to the affairs of his soul, no honest man would be troubled by censorious critics.

Nay, they who are so fond of fault-finding show clearly enough that their souls are not in a good state. They give clear proof that they are guilty of the very faults and sins which they think they find in others. "Wherefore," says St. Paul to the Romans, "thou art inexcusable, oh, man, whosoever thou art, that judgest. For, wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou dost the same things which thou judgest" (Rom. 2:1). So it is with us mortals; we suspect, judge, and speak of others according to our own interior dispositions. We measure our neighbor's shoe by our own last. What wicked thoughts king Saul had of David! He often complained to his attendants that he was in dread of his life on his account, and he even asked David to spare his life. How could Saul have given way to a fear of that kind? For David had always served him truly, had saved him from the hands of the Philistines, and more than once had spared his life when he might have taken it. How was it, then, that Saul had such a bad opinion of him? Because he himself had a violent hatred of the innocent David; and for that reason he thought the latter as wicked as himself. Cain cried out, full of anguish: "Every one, therefore, that findeth me shall kill me." But why? Why should they kill you? No one will harm you! But he himself had killed his brother, and therefore he was afraid of every one. Thus people who are fond of meddling with others' affairs are apt to measure them by their own standard. Hence, when they are given to criticizing and fault-finding, no matter how good and pious they are in other respects, they have good reason to fear that their own souls are in a bad state; that their lives are not, or have not been good, that their consciences are burdened with many secret faults and vices, and therefore that they condemn themselves as guilty of the very sins of which they accuse others.

"What is it to thee? Follow thou me." What have you to do with others? You must follow Christ. Do you wish to gratify your curiosity? If so, I will give you matter enough; you have not to go far to seek it; you need only look at yourself; begin and end with yourself; see how matters are with your own soul and conscience; criticize your own faults and sins; amend what is still unchristian and imperfect in your own language, behavior, and actions; look after yourself; see that you serve God and love him with your whole heart, above all things, that so you may save your soul. You will find so much to arrange and set in order in this one only thing, which necessarily concerns you that you will easily forget the faults of your neighbor, which do not concern you, and will leave him in peace. Oh, what a great thing it would be if every one were to live in that way, if every one tried to do his own duty, and left others to attend to theirs! What peace and union there would be in families, what happiness and prosperity everywhere! What a heaven there would be on earth! I am astonished when I

consider that marriage feast in the Gospel of St. Matthew. One of the guests present had not on a wedding-garment. "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness." Is it possible, I ask, that none of the guests noticed that the man was not properly clad, and did not warn him to procure a wedding-garment before the king's arrival? No; every one was intent on himself, so that his own garments might be in good order; consequently no one troubled himself about that man, but left him altogether to the king's good pleasure. Let us act in the same way; we are all invited to the heavenly banquet; let each of us endeavor, with all possible diligence, to appear at the end of our lives with the garment of sanctifying grace. We have nothing to do with others; we must leave them to be disposed of according to the good will and pleasure of the King of heaven. And this is the second point in which those prying, inquisitive fault-finders are guilty of sin, for they usurp the right and office that God has reserved to himself, namely, that of examining and judging others.

II. Strange to say, we neglect what we are commanded to do, and devote ourselves thoroughly to what we are forbidden to interfere with. We have a striking example of this in the person of the high-priest Heli. He had the eye of a lynx to spy out the slightest fault committed by strangers who entered the temple; but he was blind to the great sins which his own sons committed, in his house as well as in the temple. The whole city complained of the conduct of his Sons; the people murmured at their impurity and the sacrileges they were guilty of, and spoke of the scandal they gave publicly. But their father was the last to know anything of their wickedness, or to reprove it. Meanwhile he was very sharp in detecting the faults of others. When the pious Anna came into the temple, laboring under a grievous sorrow, he rebuked her at once and accused her of being drunk, "and said to her: How long wilt thou be drunk? Digest a little the wine of which thou hast taken a little too much." How many there are nowadays who resemble him! Tell that father to look after his son; not to allow him to go with bad companions, or to spend his time in drinking and gambling; tell that mother, her daughter spends too much time at the door in the evening, talking to a person of the neighborhood. What is that to me? Is the answer you would get; I do not meddle in other people's affairs. What a pious mortal you are, to be sure! You do not meddle in other people's affairs! And why, then, are you so fond of talking of your neighbor's faults to those who cannot help him to amend them, and with no other object but to bring ridicule and dishonor on him? What are his faults to you? But even if I were to make known the faults of another, with a good intention, to his parents or superiors, what better should I be? Mind your own business, is the only answer I should often get; I cannot believe such a thing of my children; they are too good for that; I know well that they mean no wrong. Ah, mind your own business! Why do you not think of that when you spend hours talking of your neighbor's faults? You cannot imagine that your children mean any wrong; you do not believe they are guilty; you look on them as pious. Why do you not act in the same way when the faults of other people's children are related to you by some backbiting, talkative individual? You are only too ready to believe them, and to join in the uncharitable remarks that are made. We are only too apt to say then that the man is nothing to us; we have nothing to do with him; and yet, when he is not present, and there is not the least hope of doing him any good, we criticize his faults, and make him the subject of injurious suspicions, rash judgments, and uncharitable talk, and we make light of doing so, although it is then really that we should remember that we have not to trouble ourselves about our neighbor's affairs.

For it belongs to God alone to pronounce judgment on others; and we are thus guilty of usurping his office. "But who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?" asks St. James in his Epistle, and who find fault with and condemn his actions? Who has commissioned you to do that? Are you appointed his judge and overseer? No, for the Supreme Judge has forbidden you to usurp that office: "Judge not;" "Look not after wickedness in the house of the just," nor seek for faults in your neighbor. If a stranger came into your house without knocking at the door and entered your room, you would consider him guilty of a great insolence and show him the door at once; and yet you venture, uninvited, into the houses of others, that is, you examine, criticize, and find fault with what is done in them, and speak of it everywhere. Who gave you authority to do that? You usurp an authority that does not belong to you.

Job, although he was the most patient of men, and bore all his trials meekly and silently, blessing God for them, yet, when his inconsiderate friends, not content with reproaching him with his sufferings, began to find fault with his actions, and to attribute the calamities that had befallen him to his sins, he could not restrain himself any longer, and he cried out: "Why do you persecute me as God?" Why do you presume to act the part

of God, and to sit in judgment on me and my actions? Inquisitive and meddlesome fault-finder, do you then wish to make yourself equal to God, as far as his office as Judge is concerned? But what do I say? Equal! You arrogate to yourself even greater authority than God exercises. Christ, although he is the Lord of all created things, and has full power over the present and the future, yet does not pronounce judgment on any one until after death: "And then will he render to every man according to his works." How patiently, meanwhile, he bears with sinners! How careful he is to prevent their misdeeds from being publicly known! How strictly he commands confessors never to make known by the least sign any sin they have heard in confession! But you, presumptuous man, dare to anticipate his judgment, and to pry into, judge, condemn, and talk about the faults of others, while the latter are still on earth, and perhaps, too, even after they have amended those faults, or resolved to amend them.

Woe to you, fault-finders and prying intermeddlers, on that day when your turn shall come to be judged! I would not willingly be in your place then! Not without reason has our Lord, who cannot and will not allow his honor to suffer, threatened in three of the Gospels that as you deal with others, so will he deal with you. You now constitute yourselves judges of others, without any right to do so; but you yourselves will have to appear before a Judge from whom you will not be able to conceal anything. You now discuss and examine, partly through curiosity, partly through envy and malice, the lives of others, and you notice the least fault they commit; "with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again." God himself will subject your lives to a strict examination; he will light a lantern, as he says himself, and will search the most hidden recesses of your hearts, nor shall the least fault escape him. You now interpret in a bad sense all you see or hear of others, although you should give them credit for a good intention, even when their outward acts are inexcusable; "it shall be measured to you again;" God will take no excuse from you, but will pronounce sentence on you, according to the strictness of his justice, and the full weight of your sins. You now speak of your neighbor's faults, and make no secret of anything that you know or suspect to another's disadvantage, and thus you bring ridicule and dishonor on many a one: "it shall be measured to you again;" when the proper time comes, God will not keep silent about you; he will open the Book in which he has the record of all your wickedness, even to your most secret thoughts, and he will read it out, to your unutterable confusion, in presence of the whole world, before heaven and earth, before Angels, men and devils. You now talk ill of and condemn many an honest man behind his back, when he cannot defend himself; "it shall be measured to you again;" God, without asking you about it, will pronounce on you that most severe and irrevocable sentence, without pity or mercy, which condemns the wicked to the flames of hell, and makes them accursed forever. Let others think, judge, talk, and laugh about our faults, as long as they please; our only concern must be to look well to ourselves, and to live as we ought, that we may save our own immortal souls. Amen.

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