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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-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

God's Goodness towards the Penitent Sinner

"Render therefore to God the Things that are God's." St. Matthew 22:21.

Body and soul and all that we have are the things that are God's. We are literally composed of benefits, which we receive from his liberality every moment of our lives He has created us out of nothing and kept us in life by his almighty power. He has cleansed us in Baptism from the sin in which we were born, and has adopted us as his children. And when we, by, the sins we committed, treated God most contumeliously, and rejected that first grace, his mercy has again received us in the Sacrament of Penance to his favor and friendship. But what is most wonderful of all, he still continues to enrich us with countless benefits, as if we had never done the least thing to displease him. Body and soul, all we have are God's, everything we have is a benefit we receive from God. Countless are the benefits that God has bestowed upon us, especially that he has pardoned us our sins so often in the Sacrament of Penance and re-admitted us to his grace. Now I shall call your attention to the still more wonderful goodness that God shows after we have done penance and have been converted to him.

When sinners are converted,

- I. *The past is forgotten; and*
- II. *Future rewards are promised to the penitent by God.*

I. Rare and difficult it is for us to completely forget and pardon a grievous injury. Only too true are the words of St. Augustine: "Men never pardon fully," although they are offended by one like themselves, far more gracious and good is God to us. He is much more ready to forgive, and much more complete is his forgiveness! We poor worms of the earth, may have dared to rebel against God; we may have despised him to his very face, trampled his law under foot, and said to him, "I will not serve!" We will not do what he has commanded! We may have done this ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand times, until our sins have surpassed in number the hairs of our heads; although he has never given us the least cause to offend him; although every moment of our lives we have enjoyed his benefits, and have had cause to love him above all things with our whole heart. After having treated him so unbecomingly, had he not just reason to cast us away from his sight forever, and to hate us as his irreconcilable enemy? Certainly. Yet God, who in his infinite wisdom and omniscience, knows and sees all things, has at our first genuine act of contrition, received us again as fully into his friendship and love as if we had never offended him by our multiplied sins; we again become his dear children, as we were when we were still innocent; nor have we any reason to fear that he will remember our presumption, nor reproach us with

our ingratitude, nor withdraw his favor from us on its account. Nay, we need not fear that he will even remember our sins for all eternity. Everything is as completely forgotten and buried as if it had never existed. "He will have mercy on us, he will put away our iniquities, and he will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea" (Mich. 17:19). "If the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done" (Ezech. 18:21, 22).

If you read the Holy Scripture, you will find countless examples of sinners whom the Almighty has forgiven the most grievous sins, on their doing penance. In some cases you will see, that, after having forgiven the guilt of sin, the Lord has sent temporal calamities and afflictions, in order to help the sinner to satisfy in this life for what he owed the divine justice; but you will not be able to point out a single instance in which the good God ever reproached a sinner with the sins he had forgiven. Magdalene was a public sinner; Matthew was a usurer; Peter denied his Master; Thomas was an obstinate unbeliever. But did Christ, after having forgiven them, ever utter the least reproach on account of their former transgressions? No; not the slightest sign of displeasure ever escaped his lips on that account. And when our meek Lord wished to reprove the city of Jerusalem, what words did he use? "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee" (Matt. 23:37). Had not many Prophets been slain in Jerusalem, before our Lord's time? Certainly. Why, then, did he not say: Thou who hast killed the Prophets, and still continuest to kill them? No, our Lord did not wish to say anything of past misdeeds, in order to show that which he has once forgiven is forgiven forever and forgotten. Therefore, if a man falls into sin, after doing penance, and is lost forever, the sins of which he repented will not be reckoned against him. "I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."

Instead of secret spite and displeasure because of our past sins, there arises in the divine Heart a joy and satisfaction on our account, all the greater in proportion to the number and malice of our sins. How the shepherd rejoiced when he found the lost sheep and brought it home on his shoulders! How the woman exulted after having found the groat she had lost! In order to show their joy, they both called in their neighbors, and said to them: "Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost, because I have found the groat which I had lost." "And I say to you," adds our Lord, "that even so, there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance." We can easily understand the reason of this, if we do not look at the matter according to the usual way of the world; for the world judges far differently of such things; the more grievous the offence, the more bitter and inveterate the hatred it entails. But when we consider the examples of the Saints we can understand to a certain extent how God rejoices at the conversion of the sinner.

II. He promises future rewards to the true penitent.

What was the sinner before he did penance? A sick man, nay, as far as his soul was concerned, a dead man, who was on the very brink of hell; he was an unfruitful, withered, worthless tree, that could only bring forth bad and corrupt fruit. He was one of those, of whom St. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees: "For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:20). Now, the sick man is restored to health; the tree is in full blossom. But what labor and skill God had to employ before he brought matters to such a pitch! How many inspirations it took; how many inspirations, and interior warnings! How the Lord was forced to arouse the sinner's conscience either by his inspirations, or by his Angels, or by his preachers and confessors, to a sense of his unhappy state! Can we imagine that God is satisfied to expend in vain such an amount of trouble and labor? That the result is a matter of indifference to him? I rather think that he will value more highly him whom he has won with great trouble. He will help him by more copious graces, and strengthen and protect him in temptations that he may not fall so easily into sin. He will make him more careful and humble by the knowledge of his weakness, and will urge him to greater zeal by the recollection of his past sins. It frequently happens that they who were formerly great sinners, when they become converted to God by sincere repentance, are much more zealous in the divine service, and become holier than many others who never lost their innocence.

This special favor and love of God for penitent sinners, is unlike anything we find amongst men. A father is always more affectionate to an obedient and dutiful child than to a willful and rebellious one. A sovereign shows more favor to his loyal subjects than to the insubordinate; the latter he keeps constantly in subjection. But it is not so with our Lord and God. He receives penitents as he does the just; and he gives his gifts and graces to the one as to the other.

If you compare those Saints who were always innocent with those who were formerly sinners you shall see

at once that such is the case. The innocent and holy Elias had the rain, as it were, at his command; the elements were bound to obey him; but not less was the power of the repentant James the Hermit, who had once committed a horrible sin in the desert, and then killed his accomplice. How often did not Mary of Egypt, that notorious and public sinner, walk on the water after her conversion, like the innocent St. Raymond? She also lived for many years without taking any nourishment, like the innocent Catharine of Siena. Thus, God receives penitent sinners as he does the just, and fulfils the promise he made: "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness" (Ezech. 33:12). What a consolation for you and me, provided only we have the good will to be true to such a good God! Am I placing innocent and penitent Saints on the same level? Yes, for I find, that there are not a few penitent sinners who have enjoyed the favor and grace of God in a far higher degree than the former. Who was appointed by Jesus Christ as the chief of his Apostles and his Vicar on earth? Was it the innocent James or John? By no means. He who was appointed to that office was one who had thrice denied his Lord. Was not Paul, once an enemy and persecutor of Jesus Christ, that chosen vessel of election who did more than any one else to convert souls and spread God's honor and glory among the Gentiles? In the same way, it was not John, who had stood faithfully at the foot of the cross until our Lord's death, who was first granted the happiness and consolation of seeing the Risen Christ, but Peter, who had reason to weep so bitterly for his sins of denial, perjury and blasphemy. Not Martha, but the penitent Mary Magdalene sat at the feet of Christ, and heard his salutary doctrine, Magdalene, the only woman mentioned in Holy Scripture to whom he appeared after his Resurrection. And what wonderful graces God bestowed on St. Augustine, who had before been such a great sinner!

And you, O sinners, who have perhaps been frightened from doing penance by the number and greatness of your sins, what are your thoughts when you consider this mercy of God? "Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek him in simplicity of heart" (Wisd. 1:1). Even if you had all the sins of the world on your conscience, approach with confidence, do not let fear or shame keep you back. His arms are always outstretched to receive you as his dear children, and to treat you with all the more love and goodness, as you were more ungrateful and wicked towards him in the past. "Today, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94:8). Amen.

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