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*What exchange shall a man give for his soul*

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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-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Injustice of Human Respect

*“Behold, a certain ruler came up and adored him.” St Matt. 9:18*

He had a right to do so. A beggar must speak submissively to his benefactor, a servant must honor his master, a creature must reverence his Creator and man must adore his God. How unjust is it to honor a servant more than his master, to respect a beggar more than a king, to love a creature more than the Creator, to adore a man rather than the great and infinite God! And yet that is done by many reasoning beings, who forget God and his law through fear, love, or respect for persons; so that they do what God has forbidden, and neglect what he has commanded. Certainly a disgraceful, shameful thing for a man to do; for

*It is a great injustice to God.*

You who do evil or omit good through human respect can see how unjust and unbecoming your conduct is. For what things do you weigh in the scales against each other? What things do you compare with each other? On the one side is the Almighty God, on the other a miserable mortal; here is the all-powerful Creator, there a weak creature; here is the Master of all, there a poor slave. God has given you the command: “The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10); men, the world, say that you must live according to their ideas and customs. If you hearken to your God, and, laying aside all human respect, resolve to serve him faithfully, you will lose the favor and friendship of the world, and draw down on you its hatred and ridicule; for, generally speaking, they who please God displease the world. “Because you are not of the world,” says our Lord to his Apostles, “but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). But if you follow the fashion of the world, and please men, you will make God your enemy; for, generally speaking, they who please men displease God; as St. Paul says: “If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). The question for you then to decide is whether you will please God or the world; whether you prefer to have God as your friend and man as your enemy; or man as your friend, and God as your enemy. But what an unjust thing it is even to hesitate in a matter of this kind! “Can man be compared with God?” (Job 22:2). One of the greatest insults that Pilate offered the Son of God was, doubtless, when he compared him to Barabbas, and gave the people their choice as to which of the two should be spared. “Whom will you that I release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus?” (Matt. 27:17.) “Whom will you that I release to you?” Choose whichever you please. Oh, cruel insult!

But if you allow yourselves to be influenced by human respect you may turn this just anger against yourselves; for you are not a whit better than Pilate, inasmuch as you propose to your minds the choice between God and man. “Whom will you?” What shall I do? Shall I offend God, or men? Shall I reject God, or men? “There is no

end to the greatness of God” (Ps. 144:3). If anything in the world is precious, it is so because God has made it; if anything beautiful, it is because God has adorned it; if anything worthy of love, it is because God has loved it. Why is heaven so full of joys? Because God rules there visibly. Why is the earth so fruitful? Because it is the foot-stool of God. Why is the air so healthy? Because God has given it that virtue. If any one can be called happy in life, he is so because he loves God. Is any one free and in safety, it is because he trusts in God. Is any one cheerful and joyous, it is because he serves God. Is any one wise and prudent, it is because God has enlightened him. Is any one good, if so he has received his goodness from God. It is the greatest honor to be the servant of God, the greatest glory to suffer for him, the highest life to die for him, and endless joy to behold him.

To whom, then, have you likened God? Do you wish to know? This ineffably great God is compared by you to a mortal, that is, to a creature whose origin is nothing as far as his soul is concerned, while his body comes from the slime of the earth. A mortal who, during life, is no better than dust and ashes, than dried straw, than a withered leaf that is blown about by the wind; a mortal who of himself is nothing, has nothing, knows nothing, can do nothing, save and except sins alone; who passes away like a shadow, or like the grass of the field, that is green in the morning and withers away before evening; who after this life will be turned to dust in the earth; whose father after death will be rottenness and corruption, whose mother, brothers and sisters will be worms; “I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; to worms: you are my mother and my sister” (Job 17:14). Such is man. Whom now will you choose? Whom will you retain as your friend? The infinite God or the miserable mortal?

Would that the evil went no further than the mere deliberation! For what choice do we often make? Like the wicked Jews, we cry out: “Not this man, but Barabbas” (John 18:40). I will not please God, but men; I will not have the friendship of God, but that of men! We are like the Jews when they cried out to Pilate: “If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar’s friend.” These few words were like a sharp arrow that pierced the heart of Pilate: “thou art not Caesar’s friend;” they deprived the judge, who, knowing the innocence of Jesus, had hitherto done all he could to save him, of all courage, filled him with mortal terror, and made him deaf to all the claims of justice. Must I no longer be the friend of Caesar? He thought. If so, then let Christ suffer, so that I may retain Caesar’s friendship. Let innocence be crucified. Let the Son of God die, that I may please my sovereign. Human respect, what wonderful power it has! What the Scribes and Pharisees could not do with their calumnies, or the high-priests with their law, or the people themselves with all their clamor was at last accomplished by the few words: “thou art not Caesar’s friend.” At once, when he heard them, Pilate, against his own judgment and conscience, pronounced the unjust sentence; “Then therefore he delivered him to them for to be crucified” (John 19:16).

What happens in the world nowadays? How many there are who, from childhood, are inclined to virtue and the fear of the Lord! How many who would willingly lead a true Christian, devout, zealous, chaste and just life, because they know that such is the end for which God has created them! How many who would wish to serve God alone, and to love him above all things, because they know that true happiness on this earth is to be found only in his service and love, but who, like Pilate, have yielded to the force of those few words: “If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar’s friend,” and have become so unnerved by them that they have pronounced a similar unjust sentence! If I do this, I shall forfeit that man’s friendship; if I lead a Christian life, and try to please God, what will people say? If I prefer to remain at home in modest seclusion when I am invited out to some party that may be an occasion of sin to me, my choice would be prudent, but “I should not act as a friend of men.” What would people say of me? They would call me a recluse, and ridicule me. If in company, or during meal-times, when the honor of the absent is attacked, or impure conversation indulged in, or the faults of others discussed, I refrain from laughing or taking part in such sinful talk, and show how displeased I am at it by my downcast eyes and my obstinate silence, as the law of God requires me to do, “I am not a friend of men.” And what will people think of me? They will all condemn me, and accuse me of being conceited. If one to whom I am attached endeavors to persuade me to act against my conscience, and I refuse to do so and express my determination rather to die than to offend God, I should act right indeed, but “I should not be the friend of men,” and I should lose that person’s esteem and affection. In a word, if, when others sin, I refuse to sin with them, if I am ashamed, where they are shameless, if I serve God when it is displeasing to them, “I am not their friend.” Therefore, away with God, that I may be the friend of men! I renounce the virtues of a Christian life,

that I may not displease men! Let, then, the innocent give way to the guilty, the poor to the rich, justice to injustice, modesty to imprudence, chastity to impurity, devotion to impiety, and the service of God to that of men, provided only that I can be the friend of men.

But my uneasy conscience cries out to me, what are you doing? You are offending God; No matter, as long as I succeed in pleasing men! You are losing the inestimable friendship of God. No matter, as long as I can retain the favor of men! You are ruining your soul. I care not, as long as I can please men thereby! What will heaven think of me, and my holy angel guardian, and Mary the Queen of Angels, and Jesus Christ my Saviour, and God my heavenly Father, and all the just in heaven and on earth? Let them think or say what they will; if only men are satisfied with me, if I can only please the common herd, if I can keep the friendship of this or that person, that is all I require. Is not that a far more unjust and wicked sentence and resolution than that of Pilate? The Almighty God, to show how bitterly he complains of it, says: "Be astonished, oh, ye heavens! at this, and ye gates thereof be desolate. For my people have done two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:12, 73).

Yes, they say; but that man can do me a great deal of good; I have already received many benefits from him. Who knows whether I may not be in need of his help again? The mountains, as the saying goes, remain always in the same place, but men can meet each other; therefore I must connive now and then at certain things, so as not to make that man an enemy. Is that so? Has, then, your God done less for you than that man? Have you less to expect from God than from him? Do you require his help more than that of your God? Tell me;

Did that man create you, and call you forth out of nothing? Did he give you your soul and body and everything you have? No; God has done all that for you. When you were condemned to hell, did that man redeem you? No; but God redeemed you, and shed his Blood for that purpose. Did that man allow even one of his fingers to be cut off for your sake? The Son of God gave up his whole body to the most cruel tortures for you. His sun gives you light during the day; his moon shines on you during the night; you are warmed by his fire, refreshed by his air, nourished by his bread, and by his help you have been hitherto saved from many dangers, and kept in health and strength. Did that man do anything of the kind for you? Do you hope for anything good? Nay, can you expect the least thing from him? If he gives you anything, must he not first beg it from God? And, after all, what do you imagine he can give you? The outward show of affection, a friendly word that he does not mean in reality, an empty praise which he uses only to conceal the contempt he has for you, for he knows well that it is through cowardice that you fail in doing your duty; or even if his esteem for you is sincere, it is nothing but a mere idea of the mind, a mere fancy of the imagination, and the most you can expect from him on account of it is that he will put in a good word for you here and there, and in so doing will act probably against justice, through human respect, as you did yourself. This is all you have to hope for from him, and when you get that you must be satisfied. And is it for that, that you pay so dearly? Must you therefore give yourself so much trouble and anxiety, and connive at so many things? Must you therefore refrain from saying what you think, from doing what you would wish to do? Must you therefore so miserably barter the grace and favor of God, so as to retain that man's friendship?

But, you say again, if that man cannot do me any good, he can at least do me no harm, unless I make a friend of him. We must, as the proverb says, howl with the wolves, that they may not tear us to pieces; we must even burn a candle in honor of the devil, that he may not injure us; he who does not know how to humor the world will fare but badly nowadays. This objection is that insult of which Eliphaz, in the person of God, complains in the Book of Job: "Who looked upon the Almighty as if he could do nothing" (Job 22:77); and of which David says, bewailing our folly: "They have not called upon the Lord; there have they trembled for fear where there was no fear" (Ps. 73:5). We fear one who cannot hurt a hair of our heads unless God permits him, and we do not fear God, whose all-seeing eye and almighty hand no one can escape, who in all places, at all times, has us fully in his power, so that he can annihilate us if he wishes. Where is our Christianity? Nay, where is our reason, since we fear the eyes of men more than the eyes of God? Does not Christ our Saviour say plainly enough: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul"? (Matt. 70:28.) "But rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body into hell." Fear him from whose mouth proceeds a two-edged sword, who at this moment can make you a poor beggar and hurl you, body and soul, into eternal flames. Him should you fear, and him alone. And now we have no sword, no want, nor illness, nor pain, nor death held forth to terrify us; the only thing we have to fear is a cross look, a hard word, a mocking laugh, or a refusal to assist us in some necessity

that has not yet occurred; and through this fear we lay aside the fear of the Almighty God, and, as the saying goes, burn a candle in honor of men, and adore and pray to them as idols, that they may not harm us; while the honor due to the one true God, and the service he has a right to expect from us, are neglected altogether. In a word, God is disregarded and despised for the sake of pleasing men. “Who looked on the Almighty as if he could do nothing.”

But wait; he will tell you himself by-and-by what he can do; he will let you see how he can injure and benefit you! For a time will come when you will be in extreme necessity, abandoned by all creatures, and then you will call in vain on the friends you have chosen. “And he shall come even to the top thereof, and none shall help him” (Dan. 11:45). No one can possibly help him unless God alone; and him you have despised and neglected through human respect. You will call upon him, of course: Oh, my God! Help me; take pity on me in my extremity! But he will mock at your sufferings and reject your prayers. “And he shall say: Where are their gods in whom they trusted? Of whose victims they ate the fat, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings; let them arise and help you, and protect you in your distress” (Dan. 32:37, 38). Where are those whom you honored on earth as gods? “Let them arise and help you.” Where are those men whom you have so long fawned on, and served most humbly, while God had to stand aside, neglected and despised? Let them come and help you. Where are those, whose cross looks you so dreaded, whose unfriendly words filled you with fear? Let them arise and help you. Where is the man on whose favor and protection you relied; the person for whose sake you have so often neglected God? Where are those from whom you thought you had so much good to hope, so much evil to dread? Go to them; let them, if they can, help you, for I know you not! You were ashamed of my service; go to those whom you considered it an honor to serve.

Oh, Christians, God is infinitely greater than man, infinitely wiser, infinitely more powerful, and an infinitely better and more faithful friend than man! It is from God alone, and not from man, that we have all good to hope, every advantage to expect. It is God alone who can do us real harm, in this life as well as in the next; no man can hurt a hair of our heads without the divine permission. How unjust, then, how foolish it is, to abandon God through human respect, through fear or love of a mere mortal, and to transgress his commands and renounce his service! Let us, then, serve him alone, freely and openly, as we ought; for we are in this world for the sole purpose of acknowledging him as our God, of loving him with our whole hearts, and of doing his holy will in all things. “Let us therefore displease those to whom Christ is displeasing,” to whom God is displeasing, and never let us do what is pleasing to them unless it is pleasing to God. Amen.

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