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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-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Concealment of Sins in Confession through Shame

“He took her by the hand and the maid arose.” Matt. 9:25.

Our Lord only touched the hand of the dead girl, and immediately her life returned. It is just as easy for him to restore life to the soul that is dead in sin. Let the priest, in the place of God raise his hand and pronounce the words of absolution, and at once, provided the penitent puts no obstacle in the way, the dead soul of the sinner lives in the Lord. Yet, how often alas! Does the priest raise his hand and give absolution, while the sinner remains as he was, spiritually dead, because he is wanting in due examination of conscience, or in true-contrition, or in a firm purpose of amendment, or in the candid confession of all his sins. Today I will speak especially on this latter class of penitents, of those who deliberately conceal a grievous sin, or do not confess it fully through fear or shame. Deplorable, indeed, is the blindness of such souls; for thereby, they make themselves

I. Still more ashamed in this life; and

II. Still more ashamed in the life to come.

I. Why are you ashamed to confess your sins candidly? One ought to be ashamed, not of an honorable, but of a disgraceful act. That, you say, is just where the difficulty lies. It is certainly a disgraceful thing that makes a man blush and tremble with anguish. In what does this shame consist? In confessing your sins? Then it is a shame to tell the truth when one is obliged to tell it; and God has commanded you, under pain of eternal damnation, to do a disgraceful thing, for it is he who obliges you to declare all your mortal sins in confession. Can one receive supernatural grace, increase his merit, and gain heaven, by doing a disgraceful and, consequently, an unworthy thing? Is it disgraceful to seek a remedy in the precious Blood of Jesus to heal the mortal wounds of your soul? Disgraceful to cover and take away your own deformity and misery? Disgraceful to free yourself from the slavery of the devil and become a friend of God; to give joy to the Angels in heaven and honor and glory to the Most High? Did David, and Magdalene, Paul and Augustine, disgrace themselves by confessing their sins? Are they not honored by every one, precisely on account of that confession, which some of them actually wrote and published to the world? O! No, it is not disgraceful, but honorable, to confess one's sins. It is an act of justice by which you restore to God and your soul what you have stolen from them; an act of virtue, because it implies humility and the overcoming of yourself. If it be a shame, it is a shame that bringeth glory and grace (Ecclus. 4:25).

Sin is the only thing that has nothing honorable about it. It alone has brought the greatest disgrace on the soul, and has made it like the hideous demons, hateful to God, an abomination to Angels and men. You are ashamed to confess that grievous sin? But, when you made up your mind to commit it, where then was your fear, where your shame? You did not hesitate to defile your soul, even in the presence of others. Perhaps, you even boasted of your crime, and showed complacency at it; and now you are ashamed to free yourself from it? It is a trick of the devil to deprive of shame him who is about to commit sin, and to give it back to him when he is about to confess it and to do penance for it. And the restitution is more cruel than the theft.

O sinner, when you conceal your guilt in confession, you prefer to be disgraced before God and your own conscience, rather than to face an imaginary shame, which is in reality honorable, just, and praiseworthy, and which will restore you your honor in the sight of God. You profane the Sacrament of Penance and receive an invalid absolution. Through fear of an imaginary evil, you rush headlong into a real misfortune. Nor is that all. You are bringing greater shame on yourself in the future. Tell me, what do you fear in confession? What is the great difficulty that unnerves you? Is it not the obligation of confessing your shameful sin? If you could, you would conceal it even from your own conscience. Answer me: are you determined never to confess it? If so, then woe to you, unhappy man, for you are lost forever! You will be damned on account of your silence, when you might have been saved by confessing your sin. The sin you conceal cannot be taken away by an invalid absolution. Neither that nor any other one is forgiven (since one mortal sin cannot be forgiven without the other), unless it is candidly declared in confession. You may lead a most holy life in other respects, but if you keep that one sin locked up in your conscience, and are determined never to confess it candidly, you will be lost forever.

This truth is foreshadowed in the Holy Scripture, especially in two men, one of whom was raised from death to life, while the other was condemned to death. The first is Lazarus; the second, that unhappy guest who appeared without a wedding-garment. The former was already moldering away in his grave, yet Christ called to him: "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43) the latter was seated at the festive board, enjoying himself: yet the king commanded him to be thrust into exterior darkness. The former was bound, and Christ ordered him to be loosed; the latter was at liberty, and the king commanded him to be bound hand and foot. Behold in Lazarus, the figure of the true penitent, who is raised by Jesus Christ from spiritual death to life; in the wedding-guest the figure of the impenitent sinner, who dies while in the state of sin.

This also accounts for the King's seemingly harsh treatment of the wedding-guest. When he was asked: "How camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding-garment?" (Matt. 22:12), "He was silent" (Ibid). He might have replied, that he had not money wherewith to buy costly clothing; but he was ashamed and did not like to make known his poverty. He could have said that he was not aware of the imposing character of the banquet, or, else, that he had not time to have proper clothing made; "but he was silent." He was ashamed to make known his ignorance and carelessness. At the very least, he might have acknowledged his fault and have implored the king's pardon; but no, "he was silent." Hence, as he refused to confess, he was condemned: "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness" (Matt. 22:13). The king ordered him to be bound, not when he entered the banquet-hall, nor when he appeared before the guests unsuitably clad, but when he was addressed by the king; namely, when he kept silent after having been admonished, and when, having been asked, he refused to answer. The king represents Jesus Christ, the same merciful Saviour who opens heaven to robbers and murderers, to the unchaste and adulterers, to thieves and drunkards, to blasphemers and the sacrilegious, when they repent; but who refuses to pardon those sinners who conceal, or do not properly declare their sins in confession.

Unhappy souls, are you then determined never to confess that sin? Alas, if so, then you have nothing to expect but eternal damnation. "Some time or other," I hear you say, "I will tell that sin properly in confession." But will you then feel less ashamed than now? Will that sin appear less horrible to your confessor, than it would now? Alas! You will have far more reason to be ashamed of it in the future, than you have now; for, in addition to confessing your long-concealed sin, you must also tell every one of the grievous sins you committed on account of it. One in the state of sin, cannot long refrain from other sins, on account of the loss of God's special graces, and the darkness of his understanding. Apart from that, you have, at all events, committed another mortal sin, by making a bad confession. You have gone to Holy Communion afterwards, and thus you have again increased your guilt. Next month, you go to confession and Holy Communion again, but say nothing of the sin you have

concealed, and, of course, you only add to your sins. Now, when that has been going on for the third, fourth, tenth, twentieth time; and for, perhaps, two, three, or ten years, what a fearful harvest of sin you thus reap! And if at last, you make up your mind to unbosom yourself, to overcome your shame, and to confess the sin you have so long kept to yourself, it will not be enough to say: "So and so many years ago, I concealed that sin in confession, or I did not confess it properly," you must say also how often during that time you went to confession and received Holy Communion or any other Sacrament; and, moreover, you must repeat, with their number and necessary circumstances, all the sins you committed and confessed during that time. Why so? You ask; have I not confessed them already? No matter; they must all be again declared, because not one of them has been forgiven; nay, it would have been better for you not to have gone to confession at all.

Try to take a reasonable view of the matter. If you are ashamed to tell one sin now, how great will not your shame be when you have thus a long and terrible catalogue of sins to reveal? Now you can tell the sin in less time than it takes to say the "Our Father"; afterwards, it will take you an hour or more to make your confession; and you will have to suffer more shame, to suffer it longer, and to suffer it more frequently. Is it not folly to choose a long and painful illness instead of a passing indisposition? I will say nothing of the gnawing of conscience, which torments such a sinner day and night, and continually reproaches him with his secret guilt; nothing of the exceeding great injury done his soul, for during the whole time he is in the state of sin, none of his good works are meritorious of heaven; nor of the terrible risk he runs of dying at any moment, and being hurled into hell.

If a thorn gets into your foot, do you not pull it out at once, although you hurt yourself in doing so? How long then will you keep that thorn, that concealed sin, in your conscience? Is it not better for you to take it out at once by a good confession, and at the cost of a little imaginary shame, than to allow it to rankle here for a long time, and to cover you with eternal shame?

In the life to come?

If you do not conquer this imaginary shame, what confusion you will bring upon yourself hereafter by concealing your sins! For you will certainly be put to infinite shame before all men, at the last Judgment. You will be exposed, not merely before one sinful mortal, but in presence of all the demons and reprobate of hell; not before one just man, but in presence of all the Angels and Saints of heaven; not before one compassionate man, but before all creatures, who shall be embittered against you and seek for vengeance on you; not to be justified and absolved, but to be condemned. Under all these terrible circumstances, you will have to declare openly the sin you now conceal. And the confusion that will then overwhelm you will be eternal, for it will never fade from the memory of the just, or of the wicked, nor will it ever cease to torment your own conscience. "Behold," threatens the Lord by the prophet Nahum, "I come against thee, saith the Lord of hosts and I will show thy nakedness to the nations and thy shame to kingdoms . . . and will disgrace thee and will make an example of thee" (Nahum 3:5, 6). Ah, think what a terrible disgrace that will be! You now enter the confessional, in which one man is sitting with the intention of helping you, as if you were going into a torture-chamber; what will you not suffer if you have to disclose all your crimes before the same confessor from whom you wish to conceal them now, and before heaven and earth as well? Our very sins have voices, and at the last day they will cry out against you: Father, mother, wife, husband, hear what your child, or wife or husband has done; and hear it, too, all men and Angels! Oh, how you will then, for very shame, call upon the mountains and hills to cover you, but in vain!

St. Paul says to all sinners: "What fruit, therefore, had you then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?" (Rom. 6:21). Let me vary the question to those penitents who conceal their sins in the Sacrament of Penance. What advantage do you derive from those sins that you were ashamed to confess? If you think of confessing them at some future time, then you cannot but see that your shame will be all the greater. Consider the matter, then according to common sense; see how foolishly you have acted, and make up your mind to follow the advice of the Wise Man: "Be not ashamed to confess thy sins" (Ecclus. 4:31), and to confess them all honestly and candidly. And that the devil may not increase your fear and shame while you are in the confessional, do as David did when he went against the Philistines in his shepherd's dress. He first of all overcame and slew the giant Goliath, and when the Philistines saw their champion conquered, they took to flight. Confess, first of all, the sin you are most ashamed of, and then you will have little difficulty in confessing the others. If

you cannot summon up courage enough to tell it to your ordinary confessor, who (you fancy) has a good opinion of you, then there are confessors enough; choose any one you please; for in such circumstances, it is better to change, for once, than to make a bad confession. If you have a sin on your conscience for the last ten, twenty, fifty years, be not ashamed on that account; the priest will receive you with the greatest kindness, mildness, and charity; and he will rejoice at having the opportunity of freeing your soul from its miserable state, and winning it back to God. Perhaps, you imagine that it will be impossible for you to remember all the sins you have committed in so many years. Take courage; the priest will help you, and you will be able to make your confession without difficulty.

Fly for refuge to Jesus Christ, humbly praying him to strengthen your heart by the precious Blood he has shed for you, and by the powerful help of his grace, you shall conquer your fear and shame. From the wounds of Jesus, flows a virtue enabling us to candidly reveal our most shameful sins in confession. Amen.

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