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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 + + +

THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END = Volume 5

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Unhappy Death of the Wicked

*"My daughter is even now dead."* St. Matthew 9:18

Who would have thought that this maiden should have been hurried off so soon by death in the bloom of youth? Certainly neither her father nor she herself would have imagined such a thing; and yet she died. So true are the words: "At what hour you think not the Son of man will come" (St. Luke 12:40). He will come when we least expect. Yet this death was in some respects consoling for the father, because he had at hand Christ the Son of God, from whom he might seek help and comfort; and fortunate for the innocent daughter, because she was immediately raised from the dead by the same Son of God and restored to life; and even if she had not been restored to life, her death would have been a happy one, since she departed in her first innocence. The death of the just, whether it comes early or late, suddenly or slowly, foreseen or unforeseen, is always a consoling and happy death; therefore the pious need not fear death, for they are always ready for it. But how will it be with sinners if they are called away without doing penance? The death of sinners and the wicked is full of woe and misery, without help or consolation,

*I. From creatures;*

*II. From God.*

I. In nearly all the sorrows of life some comfort and help may be found in creatures. Nature has given every man a voice, that he may at once call for help when he is in distress. If a child or an old man falls down in the street he calls out for help; if one is in danger of drowning he cries out for help. Fear and anguish are lessened when there is hope of aid. The first means of succor that nature has given to every one in sorrow is to seek consolation and somewhere, either in his own thoughts, or in complaints and prayers addressed to others that they may assist him, or at least speak to him words of comfort. And many a one thinks he has got rid of half the load of his grief when he has revealed it to a good friend (As in Confession). If the father of a family dies, what an affliction for the children! Yet they have the consolation of knowing that their mother is still left to them. (One eye, one arm, one foot.)

2. But the death of the unrepentant sinner is indeed the misery of all miseries, for he is surrounded by anguish on all sides, when he thinks of his friends. Then will be verified for him the words that the weeping Saviour spoke over the city of Jerusalem, alluding to its future destruction: "The days shall come upon thee: and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side" (St. Luke

19:43). Wherever the unhappy man, turns on his bed of death, he finds nothing but pain and sorrow. If he looks at his friends, oh, what grief! he has to part from them. Good-bye, father, he says with sorrowful heart; good-bye, mother, dear children, husband, wife, sister, brother! I have looked at you for the last time; in a few moments all love and friendship will be at an end between us, and that forever. For I am going to hell, and if you go to heaven, oh, what a great chaos will be fixed between me and you (St. Luke 16:26). Or if you follow me to hell, I am sure that we shall curse and revile each other forever with a bitter hatred.

3. If he thinks of the money and wealth that he heaped up with so much toil and labor, or of the pleasures that he still hoped to enjoy, or of the honorable position that made him a great man in the eyes of the world; “O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions!” (Eccles. 41:1). And if the bare remembrance of it is a torment, what will it be when death really comes and takes him away from everything? I am now to be hunted out of house and home, he will say to himself with sorrow of heart; I am to be driven away from all I possess without the hope of ever coming back again, without being able to bring with me a single farthing of my wealth, a single rag of clothing! Bare and naked I am going into the home of eternal poverty, shame, hunger, and thirst!

4. But all this is nothing compared to the anguish, fear, and terror that fill his soul. According to the terrible words of St. Augustine, describing the state of a man dying in sin, wherever he turns he finds nothing but objects to increase his anguish and apprehension. “Over him is the angry Judge” who will condemn him; “below him the abyss of hell,” ready to swallow him up; “on his right side are his sins which accuse him” and cry out for vengeance on him; “on his left are legions of demons waiting to drag him down into hell; inwardly he is tortured by the worm of conscience; outwardly by the death he cannot avoid. Where can he fly to out of all these miseries?”

5. How will he defend himself against the voice of his conscience, which represents to him in every detail and with the utmost clearness all his past sins, thus gnawing at his heart and oppressing him more than his sickness?

6. What anguish will be caused, too, by the demons standing round the dying man in troops, open-mouthed and with fangs whetted like those of ravening wolves, lying in wait for his poor soul, to hurry away with it the moment it leaves the body. Imagine a scene like this: In a forest two greyhounds were chasing a cat, that had tried to escape them by climbing a tree; the hunter, instead of shooting her, threw stones at her until he dislodged her; but she had not time to touch the ground; the dogs had her in their teeth while she was still in the air. What terror shall invade the sinful soul when the angry Judge shall refuse to allow it any more time, and shall give it over to the hunter death, to be driven by him into the fangs of the hellish wolf! And what horror shall take possession of it when it sees hell open beneath, certain that it is to be its dwelling-place forever!

And is there then no help nor comfort for the unhappy man? Alas, no! He is most in need of help; but his misery is that of which the Psalmist says: “For tribulation is very near: for there is none to help me.” Help him, you men and women for whose sake he has so often sinned and bartered heaven! But their answer resounds in the heart of the dying man in the terms in which the high-priests answered the despairing Judas:

“What is that to us? look thou to it,” we cannot help you. Husband, wife, father, mother, dear children, for whom I have worked so hard, to whom I have left all I had; help me! help me! What is the matter? Can we do anything for you? Shall we arrange the pillow under your head? Ah, no! no! take this load off my conscience! that is the rest I require. But we cannot do that; do you wish to have some strengthening medicine? Ah, I want comfort and strength for my poor soul! We cannot give you that. But the most terrible of all his woes is that the sinner shall be abandoned by God himself.

II. Suffering, no matter how great, is tolerable, nay, even grows sweet, when one has God as a Companion and Comforter. Such was the case with Job in his great affliction, David in the midst of his enemies, Daniel amongst the raging lions, Joseph in the hands of his brethren, Lazarus in his poverty, Paul in the most violent persecutions, Lawrence on the gridiron, the martyrs in their torments. What did their sufferings matter to them? All they had to do to comfort themselves was to remember the words of the Lord: “I am with him in his trouble” (Ps. 90:15), and they were able to laugh and rejoice in the midst of their tortures. Say to some pious servant of God: your father, your mother, your friends have abandoned you; be it so, he will answer quite composedly: “the Lord hath taken me up” (Ps. 26:10), and that suffices for me. “Though I should walk in the midst of the

shadow of death,” he will think and say, “I will fear no evils: for Thou art with me” (Ps. 22:4). But to suffer without God, to endure anguish without God, to be in the hands of the devils without God; that is the greatest and most terrible of all suffering! The human mind can do without all created comfort, and without any help from creatures; but to be excluded from the comfort and help that God can give is that woe which the Lord threatens the people with by the prophet Osee: “Woe to them when I shall depart from them” (Osee 9:12).

Poor sinner on your death-bed! “Where is your God?” Look around you; turn from one side to the other. Ah, he is not with you! He whom you have rejected during your life has now abandoned you and cast you off forever. If you hear his words in your heart, they will be only words of scorn and mocking laughter, with which he will rejoice at your misery, and mock your helplessness. You have neglected all my graces, inspirations, exhortations, patience, and mercy: “You have despised all my counsel, and have neglected my reprehensions. I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock, when that shall come to you which you feared.” Cry out to heaven as loud as you please: O my God! O merciful God! in what a miserable state my soul is! Help, ah, help me, my God! What! your conscience will answer in his name, your God! Look for him in your coffers among your gold; that is the god you have adored; see that woman whom you have worshipped; that man whom you have served more zealously than me; those comrades of your debauchery, with whom you have often mocked at holy things. What have I to do with you? What are you to me? Go to the goods and joys of earth, in which you have hitherto sought your pleasure. “Where are their gods, in whom they trusted? Let them arise and help you: and protect you in your distress” (Deut. 32:37, 38). Call on them to help you now; for you did not accept my aid when it was time to do so. Thus, not only is there no help or comfort from God for the dying sinner, but the very thought of God only makes his misery greater. He is abandoned by God and man, by all in heaven and on earth!

Be not frightened, pious Christians! I have been speaking only of one who is hardened in sin to the end, of the impenitent sinner, of the sinner on his death-bed. This subject is not for you, except to console you with the thought that if you continue to serve God faithfully you shall not have such a death to fear. Continue to serve God, and that with joyful hearts; you need not fear death, no matter how, when, or where he comes for you. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Ps. 115:15); “With him that feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed” (Eccles 1:13).

Sinners, it is to you that this sermon is chiefly directed, through sincere and well-meant love for your souls; not to drive you to despair, but to induce you to amend; not to announce to you such a terrible death, but to give you a paternal warning against it, while you still have time. Tell me, is it really your wish to die such an unhappy death? Do you indeed desire to go into eternity in that manner? Ah, if so, of what good to you is a handful of money, a bit of ground, a short-lived pleasure, a point of honor, or the joy you find in a creature? And that is all for which you abandon your God and commit sin. I ask you again: do you mean to die a bad death for such trumpery? No, you think; God forbid! Yes; but see how you are living; and as you live so you shall die, without the least doubt. You are minded to amend before death; but when? After a time. Have you a document to show how long your time is to last? There are millions of souls in heaven who would not be there now if they had deferred their conversion ever so little. Millions of souls are burning in hell forever, because they have thought and acted as you do now, and have deferred repentance though only for one hour. Oh, how stupid we mortals are! We are certain that we have grievously sinned; we are certain that we have merited an eternal hell; we are certain that we must die; we are certain that we may die at any moment; we are certain that most people die unhappily; we are certain that the same fate may be ours this very night, this day, this hour even; and yet we remain for hours, days, weeks, years, in the state of sin, although if death surprises us in that state we shall be dragged down to hell by the demons!

Ah, sinner, if it were only probable that we should die, what depends on death is so weighty that it should be our greatest care not to die unhappily. If there were but one of us here in church who had such a death to fear, it would be reason enough to make us all shudder with terror, and to say to ourselves: perhaps it is I. O, sinner, do penance! penance! and do not delay about it, “for tribulation is very near.” Well-known and remarkable is the picture of human life given us by St. John Damascene. A traveller, he says, runs as hard as he can off the road in pursuit of game into the desert. While running he falls into a trap covered with leaves, and as one naturally does when falling, he stretches out his hands, and happens to catch hold of a bush growing on the side of the hole. Meanwhile he sees at the bottom a terrible serpent, ready to devour him as soon as he falls. But the worst of all is that two mice, one white, the other black, are gnawing at the weak roots of the bush he is holding. What his

thoughts are likely to be in those circumstances is easy to imagine. O sinner! such is the state in which we all are. Death is the poisonous serpent that awaits us in the grave; the weak thread of our life is the only thing that supports us; at this thread are constantly gnawing two mice, one black and the other white; that is, day and night; the past night has already gnawed away its part, and the thread is so much eaten away. Who knows how long they still have to gnaw? Who can know it? Perhaps this very evening they may have finished with you or me; and woe then to him who falls, not merely into the jaws of death, but into the abyss of hell! “Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish” (St. Luke 13:5). Amen.

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