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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-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### Frequent Confession the Means of Final Perseverance

*“Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it.” Luke 2:8.*

To hear willingly and constantly the word of God in sermons is a good thing, necessary for many, useful to all, and it is one of the surest signs of predestination to the kingdom of heaven. Yet, to be satisfied with merely hearing the word of God without endeavoring to practice the truths it teaches, only increases one's responsibility to the divine justice. Blessed are they not only who hear the word of God but also who keep it, says the Gospel; and there is another point to be considered by those who, after diligent preparation have laid aside their sins in confession; that is how they are to avoid future relapses, and continue in the grace of God. Only one means will I suggest which can best help us to this end. And I shall now proceed to show:

- I. That the means of avoiding sin and persevering in good is frequent and contrite confession; and*
- II. That he who loves his soul and its salvation will often have recourse to the Sacrament of Penance.*

I. A room that is seldom swept is naturally full of dust and cobwebs, so with a man's conscience. We are naturally so frail and inclined to evil, and so surrounded with temptations and dangerous occasions, that we cannot long keep ourselves free from faults and sins. Even the just man falls seven times. How, then, will it be with the sinner, with him who through the loss of sanctifying grace, lacks special helps from God. “I passed by the field of the slothful man, and by the vineyard of the foolish man: and behold, it was all filled with nettles, and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down” (Prov. 24:30, 31). What else is the reason why many, after having made a good confession, so soon relapse into their old sins, if not because they seldom approach the holy tribunal? Considering those words of our Lord in the Gospel, “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out” (Luke 11:24); I ask: Can the evil spirit, then, re-enter a soul that has been cleansed and purified in the Sacrament of Penance? Certainly, and that, too, because it has been cleansed but once; for if one is satisfied with that, and does not frequently purify his conscience, it will not be long before it will again be sullied, and the evil spirit, having once been enabled to enter it, will take up his abode there and dwell in it as in his own house. Hence the conscience must often be cleansed, if it is to be kept free from stain for a long time.

It is an almost impossible thing for one who goes frequently and with proper dispositions to confession, to lead a bad life. For, on the one hand, the oft-repeated, diligent examen of conscience; the frequent acts of contrition for sin; the firm purpose, so constantly re-iterated, never to sin again; and, on the other hand, the frequent reception and increase of sanctifying and other special and strengthening graces of God make it, humanly speaking, a half impossibility for such a man to be addicted to grievous sin.

And even if such a man does fall into mortal sin through frailty or surprise, sin cannot dwell long in his soul; for his next confession will banish it. True, his conscience has been sullied but his good will is there, at once, with its broom to sweep out the filth. He has, indeed, fallen grievously; but he soon rises again by a good confession, and stands firmly on his feet. It is with him as with the workman, who gets a thorn or a splinter into his finger while at work. He, at once, lays aside what he is doing, and does not rest until he has forced out the thorn or splinter, so as to leave it no time to fester in the wound. "When he shall fall," says David of the just and pious, "he shall not be bruised for the Lord putteth his hand under him" (Ps. 36:24). What? He shall not be bruised? Does not mortal sin then inflict a severe injury on the soul? Yes; but there is a great difference between the sin of a just man who goes frequently to confession, and that of a confirmed sinner who seldom receives the Sacraments.

There is a hidden meaning in those words of St. Paul, regarding the sin of Adam. "By one man," he says, "sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men" (Rom. 5:12). Speaking of the world, he says that death and sin entered into it. But speaking of men, he says that death passed upon them all. Why so? Does not the world mean the men who are in it? Have not all men, with the exception of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, really sinned in Adam? Why, then, does the Apostle distinguish between the world and men? By the world, the Apostle understands the vain children of the world, who live according to the world and its perverse maxims and usages; but by men, he understands those souls who immediately after a fall enter into themselves, and endeavor in the main to lead pious lives. Into those, then, who are called the world, that is, worldly people, tepid, inconstant men, sin enters, when they commit it, for they remain a long time in the state of sin but in the case of the others, who do not live according to the world, and try to lead pious lives, sin merely passes upon them, when they commit it, that is, they are, indeed, in the state of sin, but they free themselves from it at once by doing penance immediately. Sin in the just and pious, like a traveler in an inn, rests but for a short time; but in the wicked, it takes up its permanent abode.

Hence, the latter are properly called *sinner*s; a hateful name, which they who go often to confession do not even deserve, although they sometimes fall through weakness and frailty. He who rises at once by penance does not lose the name of a just man. If a man loses some money at play, but at once wins it back again, he cannot be called a loser. A general, who flies with his troops from the field of battle, but soon collects the fugitives, and, rushing on the foe with renewed courage, puts them completely to flight, cannot be said to have lost the day. He has rather gained it; he has conquered the enemy.

What great harm then can the crafty demon do to one who goes frequently to confession? In the soul of such a person he does not find a permanent dwelling. In the abodes of thrifty housewives, you will not often find cobwebs; the spiders and their webs, being constantly banished by the busy brooms. Swallows do not frequent a house in which their nests are in danger of being disturbed. In the same way the devil has no hopes of building his nest or of spinning his poisonous webs, in a soul from which he knows he will be soon driven out. So that, if the tempter of souls sees a man going often to confession, and disclosing with sorrow of heart the sin he has committed and the temptations that assail him, oh, then he well knows that his efforts are sure to be frustrated, and, despairing of success, he is forced to beat a retreat.

But, not only does frequent confession cleanse the soul from the stain of sin and hinder the attacks of the devil; it also destroys gradually and securely the vestiges and evil effects of former sins, or their temporal punishment. It is of the greatest help; for, although every penitential work and pious practice that one performs in the state of grace is partly available in the way of satisfaction for our sins, yet this satisfying power is specially attached by our Lord to the Sacrament of Penance. In it, besides the acts that are made of the most perfect virtues, faith, hope, charity, and sorrow for sin, which constitute the preparation for it, the penance imposed by the priest, small though it be, is (not on account of the work or prayer of which it consists, but through the virtues of the Sacrament), united with the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and offered to our heavenly Father to pay the debt contracted by our sins. Hence, one *Our Father*, imposed by way of penance by the priest

in confession, has far more efficacy in atoning for sin and blotting out its temporary punishment, than a whole rosary said merely out of private devotion.

And what else can follow from time frequent confessions and pious life of a man who is really anxious to save his soul, but perseverance in good, and a happy death? As a man lives, so will he die. This is a saying that is generally verified. A husbandman, who seldom ventures on the water, can have a well-grounded hope that he will die on land; while the sailor, who rarely sets foot on shore, may make up his mind that he will die at sea. So too, with those who only go to confession once or twice a year. They spend the most of their time on the stormy sea of sin; and we might say of them with that friend of Job: "Their soul shall die in a storm" (Job. 36: 14). Having put off for a long time the settlement of their accounts with God, and having allowed them to fall into disorder, in disorder, they will find them at the last moment of their lives, when they will hardly have time to examine and arrange them.

II. Happy are those Christians, who often go to confession with due preparation, and live, as it were, on dry land, safe in the sweet peace of their consciences! Of them, our Saviour says, 'Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: Amen I say to you that he will gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing, will minister unto them' (Luke 12:37). You are watching now; you are continually occupied with the purification of your souls; and when death comes, your Lord will meet you and invite you to his banquet. "If we would judge ourselves," says St. Paul to the Corinthians: "we should not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31).

Happy, then, I say again, are you who keep yourselves away from many sins by frequent confession, and persevere zealously in the service of God! Be of good heart, and never let anything interfere with that holy and most advantageous habit of yours! The Roman Catechism says, "There is nothing the faithful should deem of greater importance, than to cleanse their souls by frequently confessing their sins." We know by unhappy experience that we sully our souls by daily and almost hourly faults and failings. Why, then, should we not cleanse them by the frequent use of such an easy means as the holy Sacrament of Penance, unless we wish to be buried in the filth of our sins? What care and trouble do not fastidious worldlings, and especially delicate ladies, take to preserve a clean exterior, so as to please the eyes of some mere mortal? Why should we not take the same care to keep our immortal souls free from the filth of sin, so as to please God, who is worthy of infinite love? We all wash face and hands every day. And if they are dirtied ten times a day, ten times a day, we wash them again. Are our immortal souls of less importance to us than our perishable bodies? Christians, go often to confession, and make frequent use of that salutary means, if you are really desirous to remain free from sin in the future, and to persevere in good. Consider the end for which we are in this world. It is no other than to serve our great God alone, to tend to the business of our souls, and to live in constant penance that we may rejoice forever in heaven after death.

"Go often to confession?" many will exclaim. "Must I, then, often submit to that fearful torture? Is it not torment enough for me to be compelled by the commandment of the Church to go once a year? I find it so hard to go every three months that I tremble all over when I think of it. What would it be if I had all that trouble and anxiety to endure several times in the month?" My good friend, your objection has no force. Do you not know why the confession of your sins appears difficult to you? *Because you go so seldom to confession.* Everything is difficult that practice has not made easy. A musician, who does not play often upon his instrument, finds his fingers stiff and awkward. A mechanic who does not use his tools every day, but allows them to rust, finds it hard to work with them. If you go but once or twice a year to confession, you must necessarily find it a difficult and troublesome task. Everything that is required for this holy Sacrament becomes harder to fulfill the longer it is deferred. Examen of conscience becomes harder, because you have to recall the sins committed during a longer interval. Contrition becomes more difficult, as well as the firm purpose of amendment, on account of the permanent influence of bad habits. Confession of one's sins becomes more difficult, because it takes longer to declare the number of sins committed during a year than during a week or a month. Now, all these difficulties disappear when you go frequently to confession. If a man confesses his sins every week or at least every fortnight, what great difficulty can he find in it, unless, indeed, he makes difficulties for himself through unfounded anxiety? His examen of conscience is easy, because he has only a short time to go through; contrition is easy, because he is well practiced in making acts of sorrow for sin; it is easy for him to tell his sins, because he

has (generally speaking), nothing to confess but small faults and daily imperfections, or else he has to repeat some sin of his past life.

But what is the use of going so often, you ask? I will have nothing to confess. What? “Nothing to confess?” Alas! You will find enough matter for sorrow and confession, if you only examine your conscience as you ought! Your very objection shows that you are not very watchful over your actions, or else that you think little of venial sins, since your conscience is only sensitive to mortal sin, and is like a worn-out horse, that cannot feel a blow, and is insensible to anything but the spur. Shall I tell you the real reason why you do not go frequently to confession? It is because you have not a sincere desire to lead a pious life, to please God, to enrich your soul with merits. Your idea is to live according to the vain world, and neither to mortify your sensuality and evil inclinations, nor to amend your vicious ways. That is the whole reason.

Let each one of you make a firm resolve before God, saying in his heart: Now I will earnestly begin, and will continue during my life to go to confession at least every month, so that by thus constantly cleansing my conscience I may be preserved from sin, may become more zealous in the service of God, increase daily in virtue and sanctifying grace, and persevere therein till death. Amen.

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