

V3_6th_after_Epiphany= The Conformity of Joy of Conscience with the Inspired Word of God
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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 3 = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The Conformity of Joy of Conscience with the Inspired Word of God

“But when it is grown up it is greater than all herbs.” St. Matthew 13: 32.

The good works that we perform for God’s sake may well be likened to the grain of mustard-seed; considered in themselves they are utterly insignificant, but when after a happy death, in the state of grace, we are able to produce them before our Judge, oh to what glory and happiness they will increase in heaven! I showed in the last sermon that a peaceful joy on account of our good works harmonizes with Christian humility and a mean opinion of one’s self, and also with the example given us by the Saints. There is still one thing that might disturb the repose and peace of conscience of the good Christian, and make that joy and self-congratulation on account of his good conscience and good works suspicious in his eyes: I mean the word of God, in the following three pages: “When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants” (St. Luke: 17: 10).

2. “Be not without fear about sin forgiven” (Ecclus. 5: 5)

“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2: 12). But be not disturbed, pious Christians, who have a good conscience and serve God! I will now explain away

those apparently terrible words to your consolation, and prove to your entire satisfaction that

The joy of a good conscience on account of one's good works is not contrary to Holy Scripture.

Our Lord says: *"When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants."* What is the meaning of "unprofitable servants"? Must we say that we are wicked servants? But he is not a wicked servant who does all that his master commands him. We read elsewhere:

"You are my friends if you do the things I command you." Must we then think and say that we are at all events not good servants, and that we do no good? But how then will he be able one day to say to me with truth, if I persevere to the end doing all that he requires of me: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things"? (St. Matthew 25:21) Did his disciples do no good when they fulfilled all his commands? But if they did what they were bound to do, surely they did some good; for they could not be bound to do evil; therefore since they knew that they did what they were bound to do, they knew also that they did good, and must necessarily have formed a good opinion of it. My dear brethren, when we have obeyed the law of God we must not think, much less say, that we are wicked servants, nor should we think or say that we are not good servants; but we should say:

"We are unprofitable servants." That word "unprofitable" can be explained in three ways.

1. We must remember that our holiest and most perfect works, considered in themselves as they proceed from us, and in their own nature, are worth nothing in the sight of God, nor in the least degree meritorious of a supernatural reward ; for they must receive all their value from the merits of Christ, from sanctifying grace by which they are raised above their nature, and receive, as it were, a sort of divine property; so that God in consideration of this value given them by Christ, accepts our works as good, and gives us his friendship and heaven as a reward for them. Perhaps you will understand it better by means of a simile. A prince promises or commands his chamberlain to give all those who present a note signed by his own hand and seal a hundred dollars. Now I present my petition; the prince signs and seals it; it becomes as valuable to me at once as a hundred dollars; for that sum will certainly be paid me when I present the note to the proper authorities. Why? The note I bring is indeed nothing more than a worthless piece of paper in itself; but since it has the prince's seal and signature it becomes very valuable. So, too, it is with the good works that we perform in the state of sanctifying grace, which are so many notes that we present to God. In themselves they are not at all deserving of a supernatural reward; but Christ sets his seal to them by sanctifying grace, and our heavenly Father signs them, binding himself to accept them as of great value, and to give us a rich reward for them, if we can produce them after death. In that sense, my dear brethren, we can and must acknowledge that we are unprofitable servants, although we have done all that we were

commanded to do, because of ourselves we have done nothing deserving of a supernatural reward.

2. In the second place, we must not consider ourselves as profitable servants of the Lord, although we have done all that he has commanded, in the sense that we thereby make a valuable present to God, or bestow on him some favor or grace, for which he is bound to thank us and to prove his gratitude. That such is the meaning of the words of our Lord is clear from the whole passage. For in the same place he asks his disciples: "Doth he thank that servant for doing the things which he commanded him? "And he himself answers: "I think not" (St. Luke 17: 9, 10). And then he continues: "So you also when you shall have done all those things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which we ought to do." He would indeed be a stupid servant who would think he does his master a favor by waiting at table and handing round the dishes, and expect his master to thank him for that! He should wait a long time before being thanked for merely doing his duty; he is there to attend on his master. Much less should we when we do anything to please the great God, imagine that we have done great things; for as the Lord of the universe he has the right to demand our services when, where, and how he pleases, without giving us any reward therefore. And moreover he has not the least need of them, not like earthly masters, who would be in an evil plight if their servants abandoned them altogether. What does God want with my works? Whether I praise and serve him or not will not in the least interfere with his happiness. Therefore I can and must look on myself as an unprofitable servant, who does nothing but what he already owes his Lord on countless titles.

Unprofitable servants means as much as servants without work; idle servants; we have no more work, because we have done what we were told to do. We are like the laborer who is hired by the day to work as he is ordered. When he comes in the morning his master says: take the axe and cut up the wood you see lying there. The man sets to work, and in two or three hours he has finished it. What must he do now? Is he to lie down and say to himself: I have done what I was told; or must he go away home?

No; he is hired for the whole day; so he goes to the master and says: I have finished cutting the wood, what else am I to do? So Christ warns his disciples and all his servants, saying to them: when you have done all that you are commanded to do, you must not imagine that you are to serve me no more, and that you can now idle away your time. No, you are hired by your heavenly Master for the whole day that is, you must serve him your whole lives long, and do his will, if you wish to gain heaven. Therefore you must say: we are unprofitable servants. Present yourselves before the Lord always willing to obey him; say to him: we are now idle; we have done what was commanded us; tell us now what more thou desirest us to do. And this harmonizes excellently with true joy and consolation on account of good works; nay, to await new commands from our Lord in that way is a clear sign of a cheerful, well-disposed mind, that is ready to do all that God wishes.

"Be not without fear about sin forgiven:" those are the other words of the Holy Ghost. They are to be understood either of past sins, or of future sins that may still be committed.

In the first case, why should I fear that my sins are not forgiven? We cannot think without blasphemy that the Holy Ghost contradicts himself, since he speaks of forgiven sin. But if it is forgiven, how could he wish me to fear that it is not? Must I be afraid that I have offended God thereby? But there is no reason to fear that; that was done when the sin was committed; that is what I have repented of, and what I am still sorry for. Must I fear that God will condemn me for it? Truly he can punish me in purgatory, if I do not fully satisfy for it here, and in that sense I have reason to fear on account of sin that is forgiven; but he will not and cannot condemn me to hell for it, since he cannot break his word. If I were to sin again and to die without doing penance, I should be lost forever on account of this last sin, but should not have my sufferings increased in the least on account of my former forgiven sins, even if there were a hundred thousand of them ; they are to remain blotted out for eternity. So that the text must be understood of sins that I might commit in future, and the meaning of it is : O sinner, you have experienced the goodness and mercy of God ; he has pardoned your grievous transgressions because you have humbled yourself before him with contrite heart, and have candidly confessed them ; he will never think of those sins again; but do not therefore be without fear; do not live so carelessly as you have hitherto done ; avoid sin with the utmost care, and do not imagine that you can make little of it, because it is so easy to obtain forgiveness from the divine mercy. This is clearly the meaning of those words, as appears from the context: “Say not: I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me (Ecclus 5: 4). I have confessed my sins, paid off my debts; I can commence to contract fresh debts. I shall sin again, and again repent; and I shall find forgiveness again from the good and merciful God as easily as before. But that will not do; for the Scripture adds: “Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin upon sin. And say not: the mercy of the Lord is great, he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins; because easy as it is for the merciful God to pardon, it is just as easy for him to give free rein to his anger; his patience at last changes into wrath and indignation: “For mercy and wrath quickly come from him, and his wrath looketh upon sinners” (Ecclus 5: 9). But this fear of offending God need not hinder me from enjoying the comfort that arises from my repentance, by which I have blotted out my former sins, and changed my bad conscience into a peaceful and good one.

We can work out our salvation with fear, and yet rejoice in the Lord. Finally, a terrible thunder-bolt is launched from the pen of St. Paul: “With fear and trembling work out your salvation.” But the same Apostle placed all his joy and glory in his good conscience and good works, and rejoiced in them to such an extent that his heart was too small to contain the happiness he felt. Therefore he says openly before the world: “I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation” (2. Cor. 7 : 4). Is it possible, I ask myself, that the vessel of election, St. Paul, did not work out his salvation? And yet he did not always tremble with fear, but rather exult with joy, and that, too, although he had been a great sinner and persecutor of the Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore I can work out my salvation, and at the same time rejoice in the Lord precisely because I am working out my salvation.

Thus the fear is directed to the future, and not to the past or the present; and thus the two things harmonize admirably. For we can rejoice that we must have hitherto kept the right road to heaven, that we are actually working out our salvation ; and at the same time we can be cautious and fearful lest we should ever wander away from the right path. We rejoice in our hearts that our conscience does not accuse us of any grievous sin; yet we will be most careful in the future, lest we should sully our conscience by sin; we will tremble at the very shadow of sin. We rejoice at heart that we have hitherto served the God whom we love, and still continue to serve him according to our duty; but at the same time we will use the utmost diligence to be faithful in his service for the remainder of our lives.

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