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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

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Many Reasons we have for Being Grateful to God

“They glorified God; saying God hath visited his people.” St. Luke 1:16

Not alone those who were present on this occasion, but all in the country who heard of it, were filled with feelings of awe and respect: “This rumor of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the country round about.” Ah, Christians, what reason have we nowadays to praise and glorify our God, for every day he raises the dead to life, not indeed to a mortal life, but to a much better one, when he restores sinners to his favor, and gives back to them, when they repent, the life of grace. But what countless other benefits do we not daily and hourly receive from the divine Goodness! And that, too, from a God of the most pure and perfect goodness, who requires a constant gratitude from us; a gratitude which God looks for only that he may bestow still more on us as a reward for it. Now I say further, that, even if we had no profit or advantage from it, still common decency should impel us to be grateful to God on account of the many general and special benefits we have received from him.

I. The number of the general benefits we have received from God oblige us to a constant and unceasing gratitude.

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I. The kings of Persia kept diaries in which they wrote down from day to day all the services and good actions performed for them by their vassals and subjects. For instance, in that year and month, and on that day, such an official gave me good advice, which was of great advantage for the kingdom. On that day such a minister reminded me of an important matter that I should otherwise have forgotten. On that day such a soldier risked his life to render me this or that service. They were in the habit of frequently reading those diaries, so as to keep alive the memory of the services rendered them, and not allow them to go unrewarded. Thus we read in the book of Esther, that king Assuerus, having been saved by Mardochai from a conspiracy that threatened his life, wrote an account of this act in his diary. After the lapse of some considerable time he happened to read this, and at once asked his ministers: “What honor and reward hath Mardochai received for this fidelity? His servants and ministers said to him He hath received no reward at all.” God has had nothing in return from me; hardly have I even thought seriously of what I owe him.

2. Open now the chronicle of your life, and what do you find on the first page? By inheriting the sin of Adam you were an unhappy slave of the devil, an object of the divine anger, a child of reprobation. What did it not cost your God to free you from this misery and to save you from eternal death? It cost him his Incarnation; the price he paid for you is the labor of his thirty-three years on earth, the hunger and thirst, the heat and cold, the poverty and want he suffered for your sake; you cost him his honor and his blood,

which he shed for you to the last drop; and finally you cost him his life, which he gave up on the shameful cross to save you from death. This is the benefit in which the divine omnipotence and love have done their utmost, so that, if you were God, and he was your servant, he could not do more to prove his love for you. Ask yourself again, “What honor and reward hath he received for this fidelity?” Ah! “He hath received no reward at all.”

3. Consider further, if some good friend were to give you a costly present, a ring, for instance, worth some thousand pounds, and you lost it soon after through carelessness, would you not still look on yourself as under a great obligation to your generous benefactor? Now, God has given you being, and the noble and precious being of a rational creature, made to his own image, redeemed by his blood; and not only has he given it to you, but he constantly preserves it for you lest you should lose it. In addition to this, reflect how good and kind God is to you, how he takes, as it were, all the trouble and labor on himself, that you may enjoy repose; look on what is around you in the world, and when you have considered everything outside yourself, you will have to acknowledge that God is indeed kind to you. See the sun during the day, the moon at night; count, if you can, the stars in the firmament, the birds in the air, the fishes in the waters, the animal on the land, the trees in the forest, the crops in the fields, the herbs and flowers in the gardens, the grapes in the vineyards, the fire that warms you, the waters that cool you, the bread that daily forms your food, the clothes that cover you, the men with whom you converse, the Angels that are always at your side to protect you; consider all these things well. Do you know what they are? They are nothing else but benefits bestowed on you by God; he has given them to you; all these creatures cry out: O man, we are made for you, and the Sovereign God has commanded us to serve you. Either for your necessary support, or for your decent recreation and amusement, or to give you a better knowledge and more zealous love of God, so that, helped by us, you may the more easily attain your last end—eternal happiness in heaven. O man, it is for your sake that we exist, and yet you do not love him who has made us for you! O man, I add, is there any servant or attendant who so faithfully looks after his master’s interest as God does after yours and mine?

It is true that I possess those things in common with other men; but am I therefore less bound to return thanks to God? Do I not enjoy those things as well as if they had been made for me alone? What difference does it make that he has given to others the same things he has bestowed on you? Have you received less on that account, or derived less profit? If a prince were to give you and all your fellow-citizens a certain sum of money every year, would your present be less because others receive the same, or would you owe less gratitude to your prince. If a father clothes his six sons with the same costly stuffs, must they not all be equally grateful to him? Do you lose any light because the sun shines on all men? Does it harm you that the earth bears all men as long as it continues to bear you? The rain moistens all countries, the fire warms all who approach it, the air refreshes all who breathe it; are you any worse off on that account, or have you not as much of these things as if you alone enjoyed them? All these benefits you enjoy daily in common with all men. Do you not see what a debt of honor and gratitude you owe your Benefactor? But perhaps you still consider these things as small, precisely because they are common; then open your own particular diary, and examine the special benefits that God has bestowed on you in preference to other men, from the first moment of your life to the present day.

II. Answer me these questions: How is it that your neighbor is poor, and has hardly bread enough for himself and his family, while you are well provided with everything? Why must so many work hard all day to earn their bread, while your food is placed on the table without any labor on your part? Why are you so well clad, while so many are covered with rags? Why is that man blind, while you have good sight? That other deaf and dumb, while you can hear and speak? That other a cripple, while you have the perfect use of your limbs? Why is one man ugly and deformed, and you are not so? Why is that man stupid, simple-minded, ignorant, while you are clever? Why are you in good health, and so many others sickly and delicate? Why have others to live in the midst of trials and crosses, while you are prospering, or at all events have much less to suffer than they? Tell me the reason of all this, the cause of such a great

difference. Those others are men as well as you; can you prove that you are more deserving than they? Could not God have caused you to be born in the same circumstances, the same poverty and misery? Could he not at this very moment place you in the same position they are in? And if you are better off now, to whom do you owe that? To no other but your good and gracious God. “What honor and reward hath he received for this fidelity?” What return of honor, gratitude, and love have you made him? “He hath received no reward at all.” Perhaps you have not thought even once of thanking him.

1. If you wish to consider a still greater special benefit conferred upon you by God, then go in thought through so many towns and countries of Europe, Africa, Asia, America, China, Japan, India, Brazil, Persia, Morocco, Greece, Sweden, Denmark, England, Holland, and many other places inhabited by heathens, infidels, Turks, Jews and heretics; find out, if you can, how many came into the world in those countries on the very day on which you saw the light. Tell me now, why—since Catholic Christendom, compared to all the other forms of religion in the world, is so small in numbers—why have you had the happiness of being born of Catholic parents and brought up by them? You, in preference to so many others, and even to Catholics who have to live among infidels or heretics, and thus have not the opportunities that you enjoy—you are often strengthened by the holy Sacraments, fed with the precious flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, and encouraged to good by the word of God. How many children, even amongst Catholics, die before birth, or immediately after, without Baptism, so that they can never hope to attain the beatific vision of God? Why was that not the case with you? Who spoke a good word for you to save you from it? Must you not gratefully acknowledge, praise, and glorify the special goodness of God in your regard?

2. Still another question I have to ask you: How long is it since you committed the first mortal sin? Suppose that it is ten, twenty, or thirty years ago; tell me now, why are you not ten, twenty, or thirty years in hell? What great merit have you had before God more than so many others who were surprised by a premature death in the midst of their sins, and hurried down to hell? Why has not God had such patience with that man, that woman, that boy, that girl, your own companion in sin perhaps, and waited for their repentance? They are now in the flames of hell, and will be there forever; but you, who have perhaps committed far more sins, have been allowed time for penance by the mercy of God, so that, if you wish, you can gain heaven. Think what an immense benefit that is; that the Lord has freed you from hell and the punishment you so richly deserved every time you committed mortal sin, as soon as you repented of and confessed your guilt.

3. But perhaps you have never offended God by mortal sin? If so, I wish you joy. You have a still greater benefit to be thankful for, since God has saved you in preference to many others from the dangers and occasions of sin in such a special manner, either by keeping away temptations from you, or by giving you his powerful graces in them, without which graces you would have lamentably fallen. What honor and reward hath he received for this fidelity? What thanks and praise has God received from you in return for such a priceless benefit? He hath received no reward at all.

If we have any sense of honor left, what feelings of gratitude should not even this slight enumeration of the divine benefits excite in us? Must we not often say with our whole hearts, in the words of David: “What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me? Ah, my God, what return can I make for thy goodness to me? If all the members of my body were so many tongues, and I did nothing all my life but praise and thank thee, would that be too much for me to do? Nay, would it be enough?

A certain man had his eyes put out, and his hands and feet cut off; and thus blind, lame, and mutilated, he led a most wretched life. One of his friends once said to him, if some one who could work miracles were to come to you and restore you your limbs, so that you could walk about again, what reward would you give him? I would cheerfully give him a hundred thousand ducats, if I had so much in my possession, answered the cripple. But if he gave you back your hands as well, continued the other, what would you give him then? Everything I could scrape together in the world was the answer. And if he, moreover,

restored you your sight, what then? If the whole world was mine with all its riches, answered the other, I would willingly bestow it on him, and be his servant also all the days of my life, ready to fulfill his every wish. Hear, O man, whoever you be, who has given you life? God. Who has given you eyes, and hands, and feet, and all you have? God. But these are small benefits compared to the others. What do you, then, intend doing to prove your gratitude to him? Is it right and just for you to allow even one moment of your life to pass without spending it in his service by a good intention? Is it not right and just that at all events once or twice in the day, in the morning early and in the evening when you are making the examen of conscience, before retiring to rest, you should recollect what you owe to God, and thank him for it? The swine that are sent into the forest to fatten eat the whole day, and sink down on the ground in the evening satiated, without once looking up to the kindly tree that provided them with food. Such conduct suits swine well enough, but not rational creatures, for no reasoning being should be so ungrateful as to fatten, as it were, the whole day on the divine Goodness and then throw himself down on his bed without thanking the Giver. Christians, do not forget your morning prayers, or the evening examen of the faults you have committed during the day, and if you can find no faults to accuse yourselves of, the benefits bestowed on you by God will furnish you with sufficient matter for reflection.

Countless are the benefits we owe to God. Is it, then, possible that we can willfully offend such a generous Lord? Is it possible that we do not love him with our whole hearts? When the holy bishop and martyr Polycarp was brought before the tribunal, and the heathen judge threatened him with the most atrocious torments if he did not renounce the faith of Christ, "How can I renounce my Lord, who is so good?" was the holy man's answer. "I am now serving him for sixty-eight years, and during all that time he has never done me the least harm, but has constantly overwhelmed me with benefits; how, then, can I abandon him and forsake his service? No, there is no torment that can force me to be unfaithful, or to forget the gratitude I owe my generous Benefactor. Use against me the worst torments tyranny can invent, hew me into a thousand pieces, roast me alive, boil me in oil, I am ready to bear it all with joy for the love of that God who has shown me such love and generosity during my life. The only thing I regret is that I have not a thousand lives to sacrifice for him in return for his priceless love and generosity. How could I be untrue to such a good Lord?" My dear Christians, let us think the same when assailed by temptations and allurements to sin, whether they come from the devil, from men, or from our own evil inclinations; let us at once recall the countless benefits we owe the Divine Goodness, and say with St. Polycarp, How can I renounce my Lord, who is so good? During my whole life he has never done the slightest thing to injure me. If now and then he has sent me a cross, it was with a good intention on his part and for my greater advantage, so that I ought to thank him for that also. Otherwise I have been feeding on his benefits every moment of my life, and now shall I turn my back on him, and set him at naught by trampling his law under foot? No, I cannot do that. Away with all the goods of the world and all the joys and pleasures of the flesh! Away with the flatteries and praises of men! I would rather die a thousand times than willfully offend by sin God, my Sovereign Benefactor. Amen.

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