

V3_22nd_after_Pentecost= Readiness to Accept Fraternal Correction
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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 GOOD CHRISTIAN = Volume 3
TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Readiness to Accept Fraternal Correction

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” St. Matthew 22: 21.

How gently, and at the same time how prudently, our Lord dealt with those Pharisees! They wished to ensnare Him in His speech. For if He had answered their question, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not,” by saying no, it is not lawful, they would have had cause enough to accuse Him before the judges and have Him condemned to death. But if, on the other hand, He had said that they were bound to pay the tribute, then they could have accused Him of being an enemy of the Jewish people. But our Lord evaded all their snares by the simple answer: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” By those words, too, He gave them a well-meant and fatherly instruction as to what they owed their Lord and God, and what they owed their lawful superiors. Would to God that they had only taken that lesson to heart and profited by it; had they done so, their lot would not have been such a wretched one. We have already heard that fraternal correction is necessary, and also how it should be given in order to do good to our neighbor. I now go on to speak of the person who has to be corrected, and to show in what manner he should take the correction.

He who is corrected, should accept brotherly admonition with gratitude.

Reason itself tells every one of us that we should be grateful to a well-meaning friend for the benefit he bestows on us. If there were no looking-glass in the whole world, the human eye would be unfortunate, for although it could contemplate all the riches and beauty of the earth, it could not see itself, nor know what it looks like, or whether it was beautiful or ugly, white or black, blue or grey. That service is rendered us by the looking-glass, which is always ready to show us our own countenances, and to let us see whether we are handsome or ugly; and if it had reason and free will, so that it could grant its services or refuse them, we should be thankful to it for showing us any spots that might be on our faces, since once we have seen them we can wipe them off. If there were no doctor in the world, sick people would be badly off, and would not know what to do; therefore the patient, like the wounded man in the Gospel who was cared for by the Samaritan, owes gratitude to the doctor, who after having felt his pulse and considered the symptoms of his disease, prescribes the medicines that are required to restore him to

health. The traveler who has lost his way is bound to be most grateful to him who puts him on the right road again. But what does it all mean? That the showing the spots on the face, the curing the disease, the putting the traveler on the right road, are all benefits without which the first would be dirty, the second sick, the third still wandering off the road.

From these similes you may see what a great benefit is fraternal correction and admonition. It is a fatal consequence of original sin that our nature is so blinded that we not only seek with all possible diligence to hide our faults from the eyes of others, but, as far as we can, even from ourselves. Self-love makes us most unwilling to acknowledge our own short-comings; we carry, so to speak, our own faults on our backs, where we cannot see them; nay, we often imagine that what is really scandalous is becoming in us, and we count as virtues those sins and vices that are condemned by God.

Now in those circumstances a good Christian, who is really zealous for the honor of God and the good of souls, comes to you and exhorts you, or administers fraternal correction, by which he enables you to see the deformity and malice of this or that vice and that he does with the best intentions in your regard, out of pity for your soul, and a sincere desire for your welfare; he does it also with all possible meekness and modesty. That man is the looking glass that shows you the spots and stains. What spots and stains? Not those which merely disfigure your face in the eyes of men, and which are not worth thinking of; but the abominations that defile your soul, and make it an object of disgust in the sight of God, beautiful as it is by nature. He is the physician who shows you your disease and the means of curing it. What disease? Not one that threatens the life of the body; but one that imperils the life of your immortal soul. He is the merciful and generous friend, who gives you a rich alms, although you have not asked him. What sort of an alms is it? Not a piece of bread which is able to still the pangs of hunger for a day; but the bread of life which can rescue the soul from extreme danger forever. He is the faithful guide, who shows you where you are going astray, and leads you back to the right path. How were you going astray? It is not merely a matter of lengthening your journey from one place to another by a few hours, and of being no worse off for having lost your way; but of bringing you back from the road that was taking you every moment farther and farther away from heaven, and would at last have brought you to the depths of hell.

Now if the service rendered by the looking glass, the doctor, the generous friend, the faithful guide, deserves gratitude from every honest mind, because it is a benefit, although a small one, with what thankfulness should you not take the well-meant exhortation and admonition of your neighbor, which you have every reason to consider as a far greater benefit? Ah, you prize as friends those flatterers and time-servers who know how to win your favor by saying what will please you and approving of everything you do; who never tell you the truth, but always seek to tickle your ears with flattery; who, when you are most defiled with sin, are capable of saying to you: Oh, how beautiful you are! who, when death is already in your face, can exclaim: I have never seen you looking so well! who, when you have lost you way in gloomy forest, cry out to you: go on, you are on the right road. These are the people whom you consider your best friends; these you lend a willing ear to; in them you trust, although their false praise and flattery are only leading you on to destruction. Believe me, and be assured that you have no better friend in the world than he who is charitable enough to tell you the truth when you have done wrong, and to admonish and exhort you in a brotherly manner. And therefore it is but right that you should take what he says as a great benefit which deserves your gratitude, and humbly acknowledge your fault and firmly resolve to amend it.

How small the number of those who take fraternal correction with humility and thankfulness, and look on it as a real benefit instead of thanking the glass that shows them their deformity, they act like the notorious Thais. Happening once in her old age to look in the glass, and seeing the many wrinkles on her forehead and her sunken cheeks, she got into such a rage that she flung it out of the window and swore that she would never look at one again. Why so? In her youth she spent much time before the glass; why did she get in such a rage against it? Because she could not bear the sight of her wrinkled and now ugly face, and therefore the glass which showed her her deformity became hateful in her eyes. Instead of being

grateful to the well-meaning doctor who prescribes for their diseases, they act like those sick people who, when they are forbidden certain kinds of food and drink, turn away from the doctor with aversion and will have no more of him. Instead of being grateful to the good friend who is willing to aid their poor souls with spiritual alms, they act like those who, although they are poor in reality, try through pride to pass for rich people. If you give them an alms, what? they exclaim; what do you take me for? Do you think I am a beggar? Keep your alms for yourself; I am not in want of it. Instead of being grateful to the guide who has shown them where they have gone astray, they act like a foolish traveler, who, being told by a peasant whom he meets that he has lost his way, begins to abuse and curse. What brings that fellow here? he says. Can he not mind his own affairs? He has quite upset me with his uncalled-for remarks I will go on my way and not take any notice of him.

They do not wish their faults to be seen or known; they do not desire to know anything of the diseases they are suffering from; their pride is hurt at the idea of their being looked at as poor; they refuse to acknowledge that they have strayed from the right path, or else they do not wish to amend their evil ways. Thus the looking-glass, the doctor, the friend, the guide, who comes to them with fraternal correction, is an object of hatred in their eyes. They abuse and turn him away. Mind your own business, they say to him; I do not want your warnings; wait till I send for you before you preach to me. Thus it is that truth causes hatred, according to the old saying, and as St. John the Baptist experienced, when he admonished the unchaste Herod. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (St. Mark 6:18), said he. But the saint had to suffer for telling the truth. Away with Him at once, exclaimed Herod; out of my sight with that troublesome preacher.

But woe to those who refuse to profit by admonition! Hear what the Holy Ghost says: He that hateth to be reprov'd walketh in the trace of the devil; he is a follower and imitator of the devil. Why? Because the devil is so proud that he does not like to hear his faults spoken of, and at the same time he is so hardened and obstinate in guilt that, even if he could, he would not lay aside his wickedness or free himself from it. How can we distinguish a wise man from a fool? By the way in which he takes correction, as the Holy Ghost again says: "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Teach a just man and he shall make haste to receive it" (Prov. 9: 8, 9). On the other hand, "He that hateth reproof is foolish" (Prov. 12:1), and he shows clearly enough that he hates his own soul. The punishment of this folly even in this life will be that he who refuses to listen to reproof will be blinded by flatterers and wicked men, and by divine permission become more hardened in his evil ways. Meanwhile, pious Christians, this should not interfere with your zeal for the divine honor. It is true that a private individual is never bound under pain of sin to administer fraternal correction when he has reason for believing that he can do no good to his neighbor thereby. There is no such obligation for private individuals; yet one should not be too desponding in this matter, nor too easily give way to doubts with regard to the good effects of his reproof. If now and then you do no good, yet your words have not been uttered altogether in vain; you have done your duty, and your reward will be just as great in heaven as if you had succeeded. Christ has not told you to gain your brother; but to rebuke him; he does not say; go and gain him; but "to rebuke him; if he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother." If he obstinately refuses to hear you, you cannot help that and are not responsible for it. Even if, contrary to your expectations, your neighbor were only to become worse in consequence of your reproof, you did not foresee that; you meant well towards him, and whatever harm has been done him, he may thank himself for it. When vices are reprov'd, and scandal is caused thereby, it is to be imputed to him who has committed the reprehensible act, and not to him who has reprov'd it. And generally speaking, even when the person who is admonished blushes with shame, or becomes angry, it does not follow that the rebuke is totally lost on him; for afterwards when he thinks calmly of the matter, he must come to the conclusion that the correction was well meant, that it was founded on fact. Thus if he does not amend at once, he will do so gradually, although shame does not allow him to acknowledge that at first.

May that zeal and love of justice, that hatred of iniquity flourish in us, and may none of us ever flatter vice, but when and wherever it is possible let us never be wanting in doing our part to help our neighbor

to amend his life. Let us admonish each other in the spirit of charity; especially should parents with regard to their children, and superiors with regard to their subjects, be most particular in the performance of this duty. Let those who are admonished take the correction with gratitude, and thus let us mutually help each other to put an end to sin, and to extend the kingdom of God daily, until by means of this mutual help we shall eternally rejoice with God in heaven, in the most perfect love and union. Amen.

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