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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls
O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. 4 = THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Duties of Servants toward Their Masters and Mistresses

“No man can serve two masters.”—Matt. 6: 24.

It is impossible to serve two masters at the same time. It is easy enough to serve one master. And would to God that all did so, as they ought. If I were to inquire about the matter, many masters and mistresses would complain that they have a great deal of trouble and annoyance with their servants. The cause of that is sometimes to be found in the faults of masters and mistresses themselves, who do not know how to manage their households properly, and sometimes in the servants, who will not do their duty. I will to-day explain to servants the duty they owe their employers, and how they are to perform it so as to please God and satisfy their own consciences.

- I. *They must serve their masters and mistresses with fidelity.*
- II. *They must serve them with ready and patient obedience.*

I. There can be no doubt that servants must serve their masters and mistresses. The very name of servant proves that; it is the will and law of God; it is required by the contract they made when they entered into service. But there is a great difference between serving and serving. There are some to whom Christ says with love and favor: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25: 23). What a beautiful commendation that is! There are others whom the same Lord will drive away with anger and displeasure, saying to them: “Wicked and slothful servant” (Ibid. 26). What a terrible condemnation! He who wishes to belong to the first class must serve his master with honesty and fidelity; he must be exact in performing the work and the duty entrusted to him, just as if he were doing it for his own benefit and advantage; he must be faithful in guarding, and, if possible, in increasing his master’s goods; he must be faithful in protecting his master’s household, as well as he can, from all hurt and harm. Two commands are given to all men by God: “Decline from evil, and do good” (Ps. 36: 27). I can sin grievously against either, and so lose my soul. It is not sufficient for the service of God for me to abstain from evil; I must also do the good that is required of me. The same thing, is to be observed, in due proportion, by all servants toward their masters and mistresses. To rob your masters, and carry off, or willfully destroy their property, is, as all admit, very wrong and unjust, and you would be bound to bring back or make restitution for the stolen or injured property, if you could do so, before getting pardon for your sin. But supposing one does none of these things, is he, therefore, a good and faithful servant? By no means; otherwise, the servant in the Gospel would have been unjustly treated. He was entrusted by his master with a talent, which he did not appropriate to himself, but hid carefully in the ground, and gave back again to his master when the latter returned; and yet because he did not use it for his master’s profit he was

treated as a wicked and unfaithful servant, and was cast into exterior darkness. But, he could have said, I have done no wrong to my master; I have not injured his property, and I have given him back what belonged to him. No matter; you are a bad servant, because you should at least have laid out the talent at interest, that your master might have received it back with profit.

In the same way those servants sin against this duty who are lazy and careless in doing their work, and who are indifferent as to how they perform it; or who, when they see any act of unfaithfulness in their fellow-servants, do not make it known to their masters, or otherwise do not protect the household from injury when it is in their power to do so. As a general rule, that negligence and laziness may be traced to the fact that they consider their masters as strangers. What is it to me? They say; I gain nothing by that profit, and suffer nothing by that loss. That is true, if you consider your master alone; his goods do not belong to you; but your master is not a stranger to you in the sight of God, who has called you to your state of life that you may look after your master's interests as carefully and diligently as you can, according to the duty imposed upon you, and a strict account will one day be required of you, when God will say to you: "Give an account of thy stewardship" (Luke 16: 2).

Still greater is the sin committed by those servants who secretly make away with their master's property, or give it to their friends and relations under the pretext that their masters are rich enough and will not miss what they give away, or that what is of little use to them will be of great service to those to whom they give it; and by those who now and then keep something small for themselves, or use it for their own purposes. Ah, my dear people, that will not do; such acts are unjust, and are worse than the thefts committed by robbers. How so? Because one can protect himself against a robber with bars and bolts, but not against those whom he does not even suspect, because they are his domestics and he trusts in them. You say, my master has enough already; what I take from him will do him no harm. Has he enough? Has he therefore asked that something be taken away from him? Is it therefore allowed for you to make away with his property without his consent? If that were the case all poor people could, with clear consciences, rob the rich, and excuse themselves by saying: Oh, they are rich enough; they will not miss it. No, that will not do. But, you say, suppose it is something trifling that I now and then keep for myself, or steal; I will make up for it by being more diligent in my work. If your master has made that agreement with you, that, provided you are diligent in your work, you can now and then take some trifle for yourself, then it is all right; you can do so. Ask him, however, if he wishes to make such an agreement, and if he says no, then your excuse is of no avail; your master does not require extraordinary diligence from you on such terms. Do your daily work well, look after your own concerns, and let your master manage his. Again, if it is a trifle that you take away, it is certainly only a trifling act of unfaithfulness, a small theft, a venial sin. But when it occurs often it becomes greater, and when small thefts are added together they make up matter enough for a grievous sin; and when you cause your master serious injury you commit a mortal sin of theft, and you incur the obligation of restitution. More than that: if you intend to take away little things now and then, and to keep them until you have something considerable, you commit a mortal sin, not merely when you commit the last of the series of thefts, but also in every single theft. The reason thereof is that you have each time the will and intention to commit a grievous theft, and of course each time you renew your intention of committing a grievous sin.

Moreover, sin is committed also by those servants who privately supplement their wages, either because they think they are paid too little for the work they do, or because other servants are better paid for doing less work; or because they have helped their employers in some way that did not enter into their engagement; or because a part of their wages has been kept back in punishment of a fault. For these and similar reasons they try to pay themselves secretly, and as they think, without doing any wrong. Again, my dear people, I must tell you that that will not do. No one is a judge in his own cause. If every one could pronounce according to his own opinion, with regard to himself, what disturbance that would cause in the world! Who could then trust his neighbor?

I. For, in the first place, you think your wages too small in comparison with the work you do, or that others are better paid; why, then, did you agree with your master for such wages? You could have demanded different wages if you liked; and if you did not think that the work would turn out to be as hard as it really is, you must represent the matter to your employer and ask for more wages.

2. In the second place, if you have done something for him, that you were not bound to do, decency requires him to repay you in some way for that service, but if he refuses to do so he is only acting as he has a right to act, because you rendered the service of your own accord, at his desire.

3. In the third place, if something is taken away from your wages, I know that it is a sin crying to heaven to do so without just cause, and if you are innocent you can complain to your master; if you are guilty, you must bear the consequences of your own act.

Those servants sin against the fidelity due to their employers who, without their knowledge and consent, give alms out of their property to the poor. But, you say, that is a work of Christian charity and mercy that is shown to Jesus Christ himself, whom the poor person represents. Can I not even venture to give a piece of bread to my poor and needy Saviour? Certainly, it is a work of mercy, but it is not a good work unless you give the alms from what belongs to yourself, or from what you are allowed to give away that belongs to others. I repeat, without the knowledge and consent of your employers; for if your master and mistress are in the habit of giving alms, you can, in their absence, reasonably presume that you have their permission to give also; or if they know that you give away the remnants of the food, and they say nothing to you about it, they give a tacit consent to what you do. In other cases, when the master and mistress are displeased with you for speaking to them on behalf of the poor, although they sometimes sin through want of charity, still you are not allowed to give alms even to Christ of what belongs to others.

II. Two things are to be observed—namely, a ready obedience and a patient obedience. A ready obedience in all things that masters and mistresses justly command, just as if the command came from God himself. Hear what St. Paul says on this point, when he explains the duties of different states of life: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your lords according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart, as to Christ,” and not otherwise; not because they are looking at you, not because you wish to please men, “but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with a good will serving, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Ephes. 6: 5,7), certain that you will receive your reward from the same Lord. In these words the Apostle explains the dignity of your state and duty. Servitude is generally looked upon by men as undesirable, contemptible, and despicable, and they who serve others think that their state is the lowest and most unfortunate of all. But St. Paul says, for your consolation, that such is not the case; you are servants of Christ, attendants on the Most High God; and whenever you obey your masters on earth, with ready submission and a good intention, God accepts your obedience as if it were offered to him, and in addition to the wages you receive on earth he will give you the eternal joys of heaven.

What a happiness for servants to be thus always certain of doing the will of God whenever they obey the lawful commands of their employers during the day! It is in doing that holy will that all our piety, devotion, and holiness consist. Your masters can sin by their commands or prohibitions, but you cannot go astray by obeying them as long as what is commanded is not against the law of God. Such is the will of God, and you always do a holy work, that is pleasing to him and meritorious of eternal glory, as long as you do not forget the good intention, nor lose the state of grace by a mortal sin. Therefore, obey your employers gladly and joyfully, with readiness, and, in the simplicity of your hearts, “as to Christ.”

Now, there are two sorts of servants who sin against this obedience. Some are not obedient enough, others are too obedient.

1. The first class consists of those who must be told a thing three or four times before they do it, and who thus generally cause their employers much annoyance and anger, and give occasion for impatience, and cursing or abuse; or who do what they are told, when it is against their will, with a great deal of grumbling and discontent, slowly and unwillingly; or, what is very disrespectful indeed, who answer their

employers back and give them abuse for abuse, and curse for curse. If you would only remember for a moment that it is Jesus Christ whom you thus treat disrespectfully in the persons of your employers! Listen to what St. Paul says: "Whosoever are servants under the yoke, let them count their masters worthy of all honor; lest the name of the Lord and his doctrine be blasphemed" (I Tim. 6: 1). They must humbly obey, even as St. Peter says, the forward, wicked and ungodly, even those who command harshly and angrily. If one obeys only commands that are given in kind and gentle words, or when the command is to his liking; if the master and mistress, in order to keep peace in the house, must give in to the humor of a servant, and not venture to ask him to do what he does not like to do, such an obedience as that is not worth much; in that way one does his own will, and not that of his master. In a word, there are servants who obey, but only in things that are easy, agreeable, and suited to their taste; in other matters they follow their own inclinations. Such servants as that are not worth much. No, they should obey in all things, exactly as their masters and mistresses wish, even if they have to act against their own will, their own comfort or convenience; and even if their obedience entails upon them difficulty, mortification, and humiliation; this is the proper kind of obedience, in which Christian virtue consists, and which increases one's merits and rewards in heaven.

2. The other class is still worse, and consists of those who are too obedient, and who, through human respect, or to please their employers, do everything that they are told, even if it be unlawful and against the laws of God or of the Church. Thus, for instance, servants sometimes consent to engage in servile work on Sundays and holydays. They tell lies, when ordered to do so, so as to cheat others in business. They carry letters to and fro, and thus help to keep up a criminal intercourse, or do other things for the same unlawful purpose. They help their masters to take revenge on an enemy, or try to ruin that enemy's character by calumny and detraction. In a word, they obey in things that are contrary to the law of God, and against their own consciences. Certainly, their employers are guilty of sin, and of a twofold sin, when they command or advise them to do things that are unlawful, for they sin against the duty imposed on them by God, according to which they are bound to exhort their dependants to virtue, and to help them in every way possible to save their souls. Nevertheless, the servants, too, are guilty of sin by obeying their wicked commands, or following their bad advice, through fear or human respect, and by thus preferring their temporal masters to God. The tyrants who persecuted the Christians so cruelly, and tried to rob them of their faith, are lost forever. But so, too, are those Christians who were terrified by them into denying Christ. Of what good will the favor of your masters be to you if you lose the grace and friendship of God? Will they be able to defend you on the Day of Judgment and to save you from the flames of hell? Or will you be able to excuse yourselves by saying: My master or my mistress told me to do so? What! The Judge will say to you, am I not your Supreme Master? Were you not bound to prefer my command to that of your earthly masters? No, a true servant of Jesus Christ does not hesitate to think and say what St. Peter said to the high-priest, who forbade him to preach the name of Jesus Christ: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29). A faithful handmaid of Christ thinks and says with undaunted courage: I will obey in all things lawful, but I will not depart a hair's breadth from the law of God. She would rather sacrifice her wages, allow herself to be ill-treated and turned out of the house, nay, would give up her life rather than act against her conscience or disobey the law of God, her Supreme Lord and Master.

Finally, you must obey contentedly and patiently. There is no doubt that you have many difficulties and annoyances to put up with every day, especially when your employers are hard, fault-finding, captious, and suspicious. But you must think to yourselves: this is the state in which God wishes me to serve him; this is the cross by which he wishes to bring me to heaven. Other people have their crosses to bear; my master has his troubles and difficulties with the household; my mistress has her trials with her children, or elsewhere, of which I know nothing, and perhaps she has more to bear than I; therefore I will carry my cross, and bear it patiently for God's sake. I shall always say in my heart: Lord, "thy will be done!" The trouble is slight and will soon be over; the reward that awaits me is exceeding great, and will last forever. Remember that the God whom you serve in the person of your employer is "a God of patience," but also

“a God of consolation” (Rom. 15: 5). Serve your employers faithfully, obey them patiently! Encourage yourselves to do this by the example of the great King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, who for our sake “took the form of a servant;” who says of himself: “I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Matt. 20 : 28); who was not only obedient to his heavenly Father even unto death (Phillip 2: 8), but was also subject to poor mortals, to a poor virgin and a poor carpenter: “He was subject to them” (Luke 2: 51). That is all we read of Christ from his twelfth to his thirtieth year. If you do your duty well, and for the love of God, you are much better off than many rich lords and ladies, and on the Day of Judgment you will take precedence of the highest potentates of earth, for then no notice will be taken of earthly rank. You will not be asked whether you were master or servant, mistress or maid, but whether you lived a just and pious life, according to your state, and fulfilled your duty properly. You will be placed on the right hand of your Judge, and will hear the consoling words from the mouth of your heavenly Father: “Call the laborers and pay them their hire” (Matt. 20 : 8); and with what indescribable joy you will hear Christ say to you: “Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful,” for a short time, to me and to thy temporal master, “I will place thee over many things;” come now, “enter into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt. 25: 21), a blessing that I wish you with all my heart. Amen.

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