

V3_Sexagesima= The Loss of Peace of Conscience

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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 + + +

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

VOL. III

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Loss of Peace of Conscience

“They who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.” St. Luke 8: 15

They are then faithful servants of God who keep the divine law in a good and very good heart, and bring forth fruit in patience; that is, in cheerful contentment of heart which they have from their good conscience. May peace of heart be and remain with you! For the sake of your salvation, never to disturb or interrupt this peace, which is the source of true joy in this valley of tears! I beg of you never to disturb it, because no angel in heaven, no devil in hell, no man on earth, no trouble or sorrow, can take this peace from you, unless you yourselves give it up of your own free will, by losing God through sin.

The loss of God, whom sin alone drives out of the conscience, disturbs the peace of the human heart; therefore if we wish to preserve this peace constantly we must fear and shun sin alone.

For the human heart to have rest and peace it must necessarily be and remain in the place appointed for it as its center. What is the proper natural center of the human heart?

Nothing else but God alone. Just as the Creator has appointed the forests for beasts, the air for the birds, the water for fishes, their orbits for the planets, the firmament for the stars, so has He kept the human soul for Himself alone. "Man," says St. Augustine, "is created to know the Supreme Good, and knowing, to love Him, loving, to possess Him;" Thus it is in the Lord God alone that the human heart can find true peace and repose. For if nothing in the world can give rest and peace to the heart but the possession of God in a good conscience, it follows as a matter of course that there is nothing in the world but the loss of God by a bad conscience which can interrupt and disturb this peace. Now it is by grievous sin that God is driven out of the conscience. As long as man is in the state of sanctifying grace he is united with God, and God with him, in the bonds of the most perfect friendship and love; so that not only does he belong to God completely and entirely, but God completely and entirely belongs to him; and he can say to God with truth, in the words of David: "I am thine, save thou me" (Ps. 118: 94). And also: Thou art mine, O Lord! Thou belongest to me! Nay, says St. Thomas of Villanova, there is no good on earth that he can call his own as much as the Supreme Good. "O man!" says the saint, "thou lovest what is thine; thy clothes, thy house, thy money, love thy God, too, for nothing is as much thine as He." But if you lose yourself so far as to consent to one mortal sin, though but in thought, then a thousand times unhappy man! Now and not till now is that bond of friendship and property between you and your God completely broken! You have lost your God and with Him everything else! You may be poor and needy as far as the outward goods of this world are concerned; yet you can still say: I am thine; thou art mine! For poverty and want do not separate men from God. You may be weak and sickly, still can you say: I am thine; thou, art mine, O God; for sickness does not separate you from God. You may be the most despised, abandoned, persecuted man on the face of the earth, still can you say: I am thine; thou art mine, O God! For contempt, desolation, persecution, and all calamities whatever be their names, do not separate men from God. There is nothing in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that can take God away from you except sin alone; sin is that wicked thief that robs you of God, the Supreme Good, and of everything else with Him. Sin is a turning from God, by which the friendship of God with man, and that of man with God is turned into a deadly enmity.

How bitterly Saul complained to Samuel of this separation or rather expressed the despair it inspired him with! "I am in great distress," he said, "for the Philistines fight against me, and God is departed from me" (I. Kings 28:15), which is the most terrible of all. Michas had given hospitality to some strangers, who stole his idols when they went away; as soon as he found out the theft, he hurried after them, crying out aloud and filling the air with his lamentations. "What aileth thee?" they said to him. "Why dost thou cry?" Ah, said he, "you have taken away my gods, which I have made me, and the priest, and all that I have, and do you say: What aileth thee?" (Judges 18: 23, 24.) With my gods you have taken away my goods; have I then not reason to cry and lament? How troubled king David was day and night, when his conscience reproached him with having lost God! "My tears have been my bread day and night: whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?" (Ps. 12: 4.) O sinner, see about you, look into your heart; "where is thy God?" You have Him no

longer. "God is departed from me," you can say with Saul. "You have taken away my God," you can say with Michas to the sins you have committed. Accursed avarice! Wicked pride! Wretched gluttony and drunkenness! Wild desire of revenge! You have taken away my God and with Him everything! And do you think that while your conscience thus stings you it is possible for you to enjoy repose and peace of heart? No, that cannot be; for how could you have peace when you have lost the Good that is your center point and proper resting-place, which a natural impulse always urges you to seek? Although the soul leads a most wicked life, yet it always seeks God even in the midst of its sins. You imagine that you seek earthly treasures and riches by your avarice and injustice, the delights of the flesh by your impurity, the pleasures of sense by your gluttony. But you are mistaken; the chief good you seek in all these things is your repose and contentment, your welfare and satisfaction; but since this repose, contentment, welfare, and satisfaction can be found only in God, you seek God without knowing that you do so; how then can you find rest when you seek God as the place of your rest, and at the same time lose Him by sin?

What do I say, lose Him? Before you got that far, when you were still thinking and deliberating as to whether you would do that sinful work, or not, even then rest and peace left your heart. I call all sinners to witness the truth of this. How did they feel when for the first time they began to yield to the allurements of some temptation, and to consent to grievous sin? What a fierce contest arose in their minds! The light of reason, faith, the Gospel law, the graces and illuminations received from God, represented to their minds the enormity and malice of sin, of the act they were about to accomplish; their conscience cried out: It is not lawful! You are on the point of making an enemy of God, who is looking at you, of losing your precious, immortal soul, of depriving yourself of heaven, of incurring the anger of God and the eternal torments of hell! Your own inborn sense of shame made you feel a repugnance to the vicious act.

Now if sin at its very first appearance can cause such painful anxiety to the heart, what will it not do when it is already committed; when the pleasure of it is past; when the satisfaction given to the evil inclinations has vanished; when the conscience cries out: wretched man, what have you done? You are a hated enemy of God, a bond-slave of the devil, a child of reprobation; and if you do not repent of your shameful act above every other evil in the world, and clearly confess it in the sacred tribunal to the priest, you art lost forever! Alas, what bitter stabs those are for the heart! Could any one enjoy peace and contentment under such circumstances? No, no. "There is no peace for the wicked," saith the Lord, who sees the heart and knows all that passes therein.

Ask our forefather *Adam* how he felt after having disobeyed the command of God. "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of Paradise" (Gen 3: 8). What is the matter with Adam? God has not even spoken to him yet, much less inflicted any punishment on him! Why are you so fearful and anxious? The sin that he had on his conscience made him afraid. Ask the prophet *Jonas* how he felt after having gone to Tharsis in direct disobedience to the command of God. Hear how he accuses himself before the sailors in the ship, and blames himself for the storm that arose. But why did Jonas thus lay the blame on himself? None of the sailors had any suspicion of his guilt.

Why did he not keep quiet and say nothing about it! No, the sin on his conscience gave him neither peace nor rest. Ask *Judas* how he felt when he had betrayed his divine Master, and delivered him into the hands of the Jews. Christ, having received his treacherous kiss, speaks to him with the greatest friendliness, and calls him friend: "Friend, whereto art thou come?" (St. Matthew 26: 50.) Not one of the Apostles had uttered a word of reproof against him, and yet he went off filled with sadness, fear, and melancholy, until he put an end to himself to get rid of the intolerable pain.

Sinner, whoever you are, have you fared any better in your unhappy state? Have you enjoyed peace and repose of heart after having lost God from your conscience? Do you now experience real joy? No, that cannot be, and even if you affirmed it a hundred times on oath, I should not believe you, unless the long-continued habit of sin has, at last, hardened your conscience and rendered you obdurate; otherwise you cannot have rest or peace. Laugh as you will with the lips, your heart is filled with anguish and sadness. Not without reason are you so afraid to go to church and hear a sermon; for you dread lest what you hear should stimulate your conscience to give you a fresh thrust to disquiet you anew. Not without reason do you seek to distract yourself by going into society, by eating, drinking, gambling and all kinds of amusements, so as to divert your mind somewhat and find a little relief from the melancholy that oppresses you on account of your unhappy state. But all your efforts in that direction must remain fruitless; for the words of the all-seeing God cannot deceive; "there is no peace for the wicked."

Ah, how comes it then that since we all so long for peace and contentment of mind we still have such little fear of the only disturber of our peace, that we daily commit sin? Are we not mad and foolish to have sinned so often and renounced God's friendship? What have we gained thereby? Has it ever done us the least good to have lost his grace and favor? No, we acknowledge that we have never had more troublous and melancholy days than those on which our conscience said to us: God no longer belongs to you. When the younger Tobias left home and went into a foreign land, how his mother sorrowed after him! How she wept and filled the whole house with her lamentations! O my son! My dear son! She exclaimed; why were we so thoughtless as to let you leave us? Accursed be that money for the sake of which you have gone from us! With you we have lost all! You are the staff of our old age, the comfort of our life, the hope of our family, our only joy in this world! We have more reason to cry out: Why have we been so mad and foolish as to drive God out of our heart? Accursed gain, that has caused us such loss! Accursed the brutish pleasure, that has robbed us of the Supreme Good! Would that we had lost the use of our limbs before going into that company in which we lost God from our conscience! Accursed sin, which has taken from us our God, and with Him our rest, our consolation, our joy, our all! On the other hand, have we ever had reason to complain as, long as we had God as our friend? No, truly; more joyful hours we have never spent than those in which our conscience said to us after we had repented of our sins: now God is again mine; I am again a friend and dear child of God. And so we will always remain. Away with all creatures and all the goods and pleasures of the world which could take the Supreme Good from us! We have possession of it again; we will hold it fast and not let it go for all

eternity! Rather let all the pains and troubles of life come upon us, as long as we have peace of heart in the possession of God, than that we should lose our God and our peace of mind to gain all the goods of the world with sin disturbing our conscience.

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