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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. III = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The Peace of Conscience in Trials and Under Calumny

“I will come and heal him.” St. Matthew 8:7.

If Christ were to appear amongst us in visible form and go about helping the poor and infirm in their necessities, what complaints and lamentations He would hear? My husband, my wife, my father, my mother, my child, my brother, sister, are lying at home sick. We know not where to turn, so great is our misery, the poor would say. Others would exclaim: We have much unhappiness, discomfort, and uneasiness at home; what will become of us? While others again, with tears in their eyes, would sigh forth now I am completely desolate; I have no one to help me, I am oppressed on all sides! I am persecuted, slandered and calumniated. Ah, what am I to do? Be of good heart! He says to all: “Come to Me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.” “Take up My yoke upon you” (St. Matthew 11: 28, 29). Serve Me faithfully and constantly; keep in My friendship by a good conscience; and then I shall not need to come to you, for I shall be already in your hearts; and I will refresh you I will console and comfort you.

I. The peace of a good conscience in the possession of God is a true joy of heart, even in the midst of trials and crosses of this life.

II. And under calumny.

I. We must distinguish the joy and peace of the heart from the joy and peace that come from outward things and from our natural inclinations. It is true that temporal crosses and trials are painful and disagreeable to man, for they torment, annoy, and disturb him. The pains of illness hurt; and so does the loss of temporal goods, and poverty and want, and shame and disgrace, and the death of our dear friends. Therefore those things are called

trials and crosses; their nature is to annoy, trouble, and hurt. But what do they annoy? What do they trouble and cause pain to in man? The sensitiveness of the body, the outward senses, the natural inclinations that are always trying to shun what is painful and disagreeable to them, they indeed are tormented; but that is not always the case with the heart, the spirit, the reasoning soul. The heart can have peace and joy while the body is writhing in pain, the mouth sighing, the eyes weeping. And if that were not the case, how could so many martyrs have been able to laugh and make merry in the midst of their cruel tortures? How could St. Paul have said with truth: "I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation"? (2. Cor. 7: 4.) This inward joy and peace of heart even in the midst of trials and crosses is the work of a good conscience; for there is nothing so powerful in consoling the mind as a pure conscience, although we may be surrounded by hundreds of temptations.

We have a striking example of this in the three youths in the fiery furnace. The spectators thought that the youths were already burnt to ashes; but on the contrary they walked about amidst the flames, as if they were in a flower-garden, singing the praises of God, and not a hair of their heads was injured. Again; Moses had been for a long time on mount Sinai; the Israelites in the camp saw the mountain covered with smoke, surrounded with flames, and vomiting forth lightnings and thunders. They thought that their leader must be either stifled in the smoke, or struck by the lightning, or burned by the flames. Meanwhile Moses sat in the midst of the flashing lightnings as joyful as if he were in paradise, and was happy in being able to speak with God. Jonas was thrown into the sea, and in the sight of his companions was swallowed by a huge fish. Ah, said they, there cannot be the least hope for him now! The fish has devoured him! And yet Jonas was quite strong and healthy in the belly of the whale, and after he had repented of his disobedience was filled with hope and confidence in God by prayer. All these are figures of the soul which has a good conscience, and has to bear all kinds of trials and contradictions. In the eyes of men, who look only at what appears outwardly, they seem on the point of dying of sorrow and anguish: "In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die;" but inwardly in their hearts they are quite pleased with their God: "They are in peace."

What would have been our thoughts, had we been present and seen the holy martyrs of Christ laughing, exulting, and mocking their persecutors in the midst of their torments, and urging them as it were to still greater cruelties? If we had seen a St. Lawrence roasting on the gridiron, and heard him saying to the tyrant: "I am now roasted on this side; turn me over and eat"? If we had seen a St. Eulalia, a maiden thirteen years old, with her whole body torn to pieces and covered with blood, and heard her asking the tyrant to put salt into her wounds to increase her pain, and to make her flesh more palatable for his cruel taste?

I do not mean that peace of heart, even in those who have a good conscience, cannot be attacked or disturbed by any tyrant. No, such an imperturbable peace belongs only to the elect in heaven. It is not unusual for a just soul to be sometimes suddenly laden with such a heavy cross that at first it is filled with anguish and disturbed in mind; but that disturbance does not last long; all it need do is to recollect itself, and offer up a short prayer to God, beg for patience, and say: This cross comes to me from the hand of God. This one thought

is enough, in spite of the agitation and disturbance suffered by the natural inclinations, to bring back complete calm, peace, and comfort to the heart, from which the words, "Lord, thy will be done" banish all disquiet. On the other hand, one whose conscience is not in good order is so distracted by the least suffering that he cannot be consoled, unless the suffering is taken away from him. Therefore it remains true that the peace of a good conscience is the true joy of the heart, even in the midst of the trials of this life. The words of the Holy Ghost must be true: "Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad" (Prov. 12: 21).

II. No one is so innocent and pious as to escape rash judgments and injurious talk. Let one be as pure as Joseph, as devout as the mother of Samuel, as penitent as St. Peter, as zealous as St. Paul, as holy as our Lord himself; yet he will find some evil-disposed person to bring suspicion on his purity, his piety, his zeal, his holiness. A single word from wicked tongues is often enough to turn love into hatred, friendship into enmity, even between the most intimate friends and relations, brothers and sisters, children and parents, husbands and wives, who otherwise would live in the greatest harmony with each other. A single word of scorn or contempt, uttered through malice or levity against another's actions, is often enough to ruin the reputation and credit of the best and most honorable of men, and to take from him the repose, joy, consolation, and pleasure he before enjoyed. In God's name, why do you concern yourselves so much about the affairs of other people? Look to yourselves and your own souls, which you utterly neglect and ruin by your wicked tongues. Leave others in peace. Think of the terrible judgment to come, when you will have to give an account, not of your neighbor's actions, but of your own.

The best defense against talkative tongues is to let them say what they will, to keep silent, laugh at them, treat their calumnies with contempt, and not do them the honor of taking the least notice of them. And that means you can best employ if you have a good conscience, which does not reproach you with any sin. Let your conscience be your comfort. What do I care for the judgments and opinions of men, since my conscience alone can make me good or wicked, condemn or absolve me? I am neither better nor worse than I am in the sight of God.

If there ever there was a holy and innocent man on earth it was Jesus Christ, in whom there was nothing that could be reproved or found fault with. Yet if ever there was any one in the world who had to suffer from evil, wicked, lying tongues, it was our Lord.

Let us, then, my dear brethren, carefully observe what St. Peter exhorts us to: "Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, they may be ashamed who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." If you have to suffer innocently from wicked tongues, you ought to rejoice that you are innocent; and since your conscience tells you that you are free from what you are accused of, you have rather reason to exult on account of the words of our Lord: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for your reward is very great in heaven" (St. Matthew 5: 11). Amen.

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