

V2_4th_after_Pentecost= Vain Is the Labor of the Actual Sinner

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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 + + +

VOL. 2 = The Penitent Christian

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Vain Is the Labor of the Actual Sinner

“We have labored all the night and have taken nothing.” St. Luke 5: 5.

- I. *That he who labors “during the night,” that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; and*
- II. *That, since the state of sin is such an unhappy, miserable, and profitless one, he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible by true penance, and constantly guard against relapsing into it.*

1. The night, in a moral sense, typifies the state of sin. No comparison is more frequently used than this in Holy Scripture, or when speaking of sin and sinners. What is the life of a sinner, but a night, from which, as soon as sin is consented to, the sun of justice is withdrawn, even in the daytime, and the light of the soul, sanctifying grace, disappears? “Let us therefore,” is the exhortation of St. Paul “cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13: 12, 13); the “night is past, and the day is at hand” (Ibid.). “For you were heretofore darkness;” he writes to his Ephesian converts, “but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light; and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesus). And just as during the intense darkness of the night, all things are hidden from the eyes of men, and thieves and robbers secretly ply their trade; so, in the spiritual night of sin, all your good works, no matter how excellent they may be in themselves, will be passed over unnoticed by God, and the infernal thieves of hell will conspire to rob you of their merit.

Is there, then, a night so dark that the eye of God cannot penetrate it, or that it can conceal anything from His sight? No says David “Darkness shall not be dark to thee, and night shall be light as the day” (Ps. 118: 12) If I were to hide myself in the bowels of the earth, or in the darkest corner of hell, even there Thou art present, O my God; even there Thy all-seeing eye would behold me! “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art there” (Ps. 118: 7, 8). But God does not regard the good works of the sinner, since, on account of the state in which he is, they do not deserve to be looked on favorably by the Lord of holiness. God does not so much regard the work itself, as the disposition of him who performs it; He does not value the gift, but rather the intention of the giver. This is exemplified in the case of the two brothers, Cain and Abel. Cain offered sacrifice to God, and Abel did the same; but how differently their offerings were received! “The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings,” but to “Cain and his offerings He had no

respect” (Gen. 4: 4, 5). Whence this difference? Abel was just and innocent; Cain was unjust and wicked; the one offered with a good, the other with a bad intention. Abel was not made pleasing by his gifts, but Abel himself made the gift pleasing in the sight of God. And on the other hand, God did not reject Cain on account of his gifts, but the gifts on account of Cain.

This is not to be wondered at, for men act on the same principle every day. Serve the daintiest food in a dirty dish, and we turn away from it in disgust. Why? Is not the food good? Yes: but it should be served in cleaner fashion. No matter what your enemy does, he will never please you; you put a bad construction on his best acts, and you cannot even bear to hear him well spoken of. But who can adequately describe the bitter hatred, the aversion and disgust, with which the God of all holiness looks upon the sinner? True of Himself, He is a God of infinite goodness and love, regarding with mercy even the meanest of His creatures. But the sinner alone He excludes from His love; He cannot bear the sight of him. He pursues him with bitterest hatred, although in His infinite mercy He permits him to live, in the hope that he will repent.

Judge from its effects, the intensity of this hatred. Imagine a soul that has lived for a hundred years in the greatest innocence and sanctity. Let it consent but in thought to a single mortal sin, and in a moment, the God of infinite goodness, in spite of that soul’s past and long-continued service, and of the painful death by which He so superabundantly atoned for that same sin, will forget all its former good works and all the treasures of merit it had accumulated. Hear what He says Himself by the prophet Ezechiel: “But if the just man turn himself away from His justice, and do iniquity,” what shall befall him? “All His justices, which he had done, shall not be remembered” (Ezech. 18: 24). Is not this a mark of bitter hatred and displeasure against the sinner? To understand this still more clearly, descend in thought into the fiery prison of hell, and see there a soul condemned to burn in eternal flames, for having consented to a single sinful thought. Who has condemned that soul to such a punishment! The God of infinite mercy and justice. Through all eternity, He will see that soul, which He created to His own image and redeemed by His precious Blood, tortured by demons. He will hear its howlings and lamentations without being in the least moved to pity. Consider now, whether one who is so hateful to God can do anything pleasing to Him or can have any merit in His sight, whatever good works he performs. No; no matter what good is done, as long as it is done in “the night,” that is, in the state of sin, it will be of no value; and they who are in that state will ever have reason to say: “We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.”

But, in the face of the divine mercy, and of the long-suffering patience and bounteous goodness of God displayed in His dealings with the most hardened sinners, and even supposing that the person of the sinner were not so unspeakably hateful to Him, yet the works of sinners, no matter how praiseworthy they may be in themselves, have not the least supernatural merit in the sight of God, because they are performed “in the night.” Place on one side of you in the darkness of night a piece of precious gold, and on the other, a lump of clay; or put on one side, a beautiful statue, on the other, the image of a hideous demon, and tell me which of the two you prefer, which you consider the more beautiful. The eye alone, cannot distinguish either the value or the beauty of the different objects, because it is “night,” and everything seems black to you. How precious, how indescribably beautiful in the sight of God, are the good works of him who stands in the clear light of day, that is, in the state of sanctifying grace! What great treasures a just man amasses! A single sigh that he sends forth to God, a bit of bread, a drink of cold water that he gives to the poor, each step he takes, every movement of his hands, every blow of his hammer, every use that he makes of the different implements of his trade, nay every mouthful of food he takes, although he enjoys it, provided all this is done with a supernatural intention, for God’s sake, how valuable is it not in the sight of God! No matter how trivial and worthless each of those actions is in itself, yet it merits an eternity of glory in heaven, which the just Judge will give him who performs it, if he dies in the state of grace. “Amen, I say to you,” says our Lord himself, “Whosoever shall give to drink to one of those little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of the disciple, amen, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (St. Matthew 10: 42). Cast into one side of the balance all the heroic deeds of the greatest generals, kings and

emperors, from the beginning of the world, and in the other scale, a single *“Our Father,”* said by some poor woman with proper devotion, or a five minutes’ work that the ignorant ploughman offers to God, or the little trouble that the housemaid has in sweeping out a room; oh, how quickly will not the latter weigh down, in the sight of God, all the grandest deeds of the most illustrious men! You ask why? Because, great as those exploits are, they do not exceed the limits of nature, while the good works of the just man are supernatural, and, being united with the works of Jesus Christ, are pleasing to the God of infinite greatness, and deserve an eternity of happiness. O truly happy state of the just soul! What treasures and riches it can accumulate in a day, or hour, nay, at every moment! O ye poor laborers, and servants, and all ye to whom divine Providence has allotted either hard work, or trials and crosses, ah, see above all that you are in the state of grace, and do not forget the good intention! How rich you are! What an exceeding great reward is in store for that seemingly worthless labor of yours!

II. Miserable, indeed, is your soul, O sinner, since you labor in *“the night!”* All your undertakings are black, useless, and unprofitable! Suppose that to day or yesterday you have committed a grievous sin in thought; say that you remain in that sin for the next six months without confession and without true sorrow for it, although you have the intention of confessing it hereafter. Suppose you commit no other sin during that time, living, in the main, a Christian life: you go to church and hear Mass devoutly; you observe the appointed fasts; you give alms to the poor; you labor and work according to your condition with a good intention, because God requires you to do so; you bear many a cross, difficulty, and contradiction with Christian patience, contentment, and resignation to the divine will; nay more, suppose you give all you have to the poor; that you practice every imaginable work of Christian charity! That you fast continually and scourge yourself daily even to blood, that you beat your breast with a stone, like St. Jerome, that you go through India and Japan like St. Francis Xavier and convert millions of souls; that you bear with the greatest patience and meekness all kinds of persecutions, sickness, poverty, hunger, and the most fearful torments, like the martyrs of Christ. Having done all that, look back upon it in thought, and see what you have gained, what you have merited by it. Perhaps you will think that you have done wonders, and will say, like him who says in the Apocalypse, *“I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing,”* but whom St. John rebukes with the words: *“Thou knowest not that Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”* (Apoc. 3: 17). And St. Paul says: *“If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth him nothing”* (I Cor. 13: 2, 3). That is to say, without sanctifying grace all these gifts and good works are of no avail. By your good works, you have gained no more for heaven, than one who pays a large sum of money in a lottery, hoping to win something, and draws nothing but blanks. You have borne many trials and contradictions, but you are like a heavily laden beast of burden, that is urged on during the day with blows, and, in the evening, is turned into a comfortless stable. You labor like the dumb animal. You bear your cross, you suffer hunger, and want, and misery, caused by yourselves or by others: but, whether you bear them patiently or not, you have no consolation from God, no merit for eternity; and at night, you retire to rest with your miserable soul crushed under the yoke of the devil. In a word, you have nothing left, but to sigh like the disciples: *“We have labored all the night and have taken nothing!”*

To labor and to gain nothing! The bare thought of it is enough to make me weep burning tears of pity! When I see a man working hard for his daily bread, or a beggar stretching out his hands for an alms, a sick man lying on a bed of suffering, a destitute man bewailing his misery, or an unfortunate man oppressed with crosses and trials; oh! (I think), if he is only in the state of grace, he enjoys consolation from God, he has the peace of a good conscience, and he can expect a reward in heaven for all his sufferings. At least, he need only offer them to God with a pure intention, in order to gain the reward. But if he is laboring in *“the night;”* if he has lost sanctifying grace by one mortal sin, alas for his poor soul! All his labors and trouble are fruitless. *“Write this man barren,”* I say of him, as God said of king Jechonias to the prophet Jeremias. But why? Jechonias had still eight sons living; how could he then be looked on as barren? God

himself gives the reason: "For there shall not be a man of his seed that shall sit upon the throne of David, and have power any more in Juda." Therefore "write him barren." The same is true of the sinner, In spite of the superabundance of his good works, in spite of all his labor and trouble, he remains barren, because not one of his works will ever reach the throne of God. See from this in what a gloomy and horrible night sin encamps the human soul, by taking away from the holiest and most praiseworthy acts of virtue, and from otherwise most meritorious trials, all their beauty, worth, and reward. Moreover, such good works can never revive, so as to become meritorious.

The night of nature may hide from the eye the beauty and value of material objects, but, no matter how black the darkness, it cannot interfere with their essential value or splendor. It leaves everything unaltered, so that, when the day comes, objects are seen in their proper colors, the gold glitters as usual, beauty shows itself in its splendor as before. But it is far worse with the night of sin; for even after it is driven away, and sanctifying grace restored to the soul by penance, the good works performed in the state of sin remain just as black as before, without merit and without eternal reward.

There is in the Old Testament a striking figure of what occurs in the soul of a sinner. According to divine command, if a Hebrew were bought as a slave, his purchaser was bound to give him his freedom after seven years: "If Thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years shall he serve thee; in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing" (Exod. 21: 2). And, besides that, if he had a wife and children when he became a slave, they too were to be freed with him at the appointed time, and he was to receive the same kind of clothing as that he originally had. But if he had married and had children during the first six years of his slavery, he, indeed, was to be freed in the seventh year, but his wife and children had to remain in slavery. Do you see what is meant by this figure? By Baptism man is endowed with the freedom of the children of God; but when he commits mortal sin, he sells himself of his own accord as a slave to the devil. Now the good God has given him a means of freeing himself from this slavery; not merely after six years, but in any year, at any moment that he wishes. As soon as he truly repents, he will be set at liberty. But how? What will he take back with him when he is restored to freedom? His children, that is to say, the good works he performed before he lost the state of grace, and which were brought by him into slavery, so that during that time he could receive no reward for them. When the sinner has truly repented, those works revive and are freed with him, clad in their former garment of sanctifying grace, like the children that the Hebrew slave had before losing his liberty. On the other hand, all the works performed in the state of sin remain behind. They do not revive they are, and must remain, without merit or hope of reward. The labor they entailed is profitless, because they were performed in slavery, in the night of sin; and therefore it still remains true of such toilers, "We have labored all the night and have taken nothing."

What are we to infer from this? That there is no use in doing good when we are in the state of sin? "Oh!" one might say: "I have a mortal sin on my conscience, which I intend to repent of and confess hereafter. Meanwhile, I might as well give up praying, hearing Mass, and giving alms. If I cannot merit anything by those works of devotion, why should I trouble myself with them? I do not see the good of working to no purpose!" Your argument, O sinner, is a very bad one. Since you cannot do any thing deserving of heaven, will you cease doing good altogether? For that very reason, you should be all the more diligent in doing good works. Suppose you have a piece of money that is broken into two parts, will you throw the pieces away? Not by any means! "But what are they good for? They are no longer current coin." True, but the pieces are still worth something and if I bring them to a silversmith, he will give me a price for them. So it is (due proportion being observed), with the good works you perform in the night of sin. They are not indeed current coin with which you can purchase heaven; they are broken and destroyed; but still they are good for something. And for what? The good deeds of the sinner serve, then, first, to accustom one to good works. Why do soldiers in time of peace, when there is not an enemy near them, continually drill and practice military maneuvers? Why do hunters so often shoot at a target, when they are not actually following the game? Is not the labor fruitless in both cases? By no means; practice of that kind serves to make the soldier expert in war, and the hunter in the chase. In the same way the practice of

good works will be of use to the sinner, although he is actually in the state of sin. His labor is fruitless for eternity, but it gives him a good habit, a certain expertness in doing the same virtuous actions afterwards, when he is reconciled with God, and when they will be really meritorious of eternal life.

In the second place, works of this kind dispose his soul to receive the grace of God, and avert the divine anger from Him for a time, so that he is not, as he deserves, punished with a sudden death and condemned at once to eternal torments. Do you know what that Roman general did when, having lost a great number of his men, he was again attacked by the enemy? He made a rampart of the dead bodies, and thus enabled the remainder of his army to avoid a total defeat. So also should you act, O sinner! The good works that you perform in the state of sin are but the dead bodies of virtues; yet they can serve as a rampart to shield you from the wrath of God, and to preserve you from a fresh attack of Satan, until you are enabled to vanquish him by true penance. And in virtue of this humble acknowledgment of his claims on you, God in His mercy will preserve you from further temptations and greater sins; and finally, He will give you more powerful inspirations, illuminations, impulses, and better opportunities for conversion, so that you may recover His grace.

Be reasonable, therefore, and say to yourself: In the state in which I now am, I cannot merit heaven by any good works; I must be mad and foolish, then, willfully to bury my soul in this hideous darkness for the sake of a bad thought, a scandalous word, an impure look, a mere animal pleasure, that lasts but a moment. The spendthrift tradesman sells all the implements of his craft, so that he can no longer work at his trade to support himself. Do I not act far more foolishly when I commit sin? Thereby, I lose all the spiritual treasures I have accumulated, and at the same time deprive myself of all means of meriting. I am now laboring during the night and to no purpose. I must, then, at once free myself from my sins, and regain the clear light of grace. I will sincerely repent of and confess my sins. I will not defer repentance any longer, nor wait till next Easter, nay, not even till this evening. For why should I hear Mass so often, why mortify myself so frequently by fasting, and bear with so many crosses and trials, and yet gain no reward by it all? Since I can merit eternal glory in heaven every moment of this very day, will I neglect doing so, determined as I am some time or other to do penance? No, I will at once get rid of the heavy burden of my sins, and come forth out of this terrible darkness.

And when you have once freed yourself from your sins, rejoice with all your heart, thank God and make this irrevocable resolution: For the future I will guard against nothing so much as sin, which envelops the soul in a gloomy night. I will avoid the occasions that may lead me into it; I will not go near that house, that person, that company, which has hitherto been a proximate occasion of sin to me. Let this, then, be your final resolution. Be faithful to it until death. Death rather than sin! Have pity on your own soul, do not sin against your own soul. If you have no reverence for the great God, who is present everywhere, who sees everything you do, and whom you insult and offend; if the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, which you trample underfoot, can make no impression on your heart; if you feel no compassion for your loving Saviour, whom you crucify again by every mortal sin, then at least have pity on your own soul, which you injure so grievously, so irretrievably and everlastingly by bringing it into the night of sin. Be faithful, then, to your resolution: *Death rather than sin.* Amen.

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