

V2_1st_after_Easter= On the Evils Indicated by a Relapse into Sin
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JMJ

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 + + +
Volume two = The Penitent Christian
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

On the Evils Indicated by a Relapse into Sin

“The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord.” John 20: 20.

Again there is joy and exultation among the disciples of Christ! They have seen the Lord, and they know that he is really risen from the dead. Again, too, there is joy and exultation in the Church of God at this season. The faithful children of the Church have arisen from the death of sin by their Easter confession. God grant that such may be really the case with you all. Let us be glad, and rejoice in the Lord. But there is one thing that troubles me; namely, that this joyful feast will be spoiled, in a short time, by the relapse of some penitents into their former evil ways. How wicked and ungrateful of them to thus treat their good God, and what imminent danger in which to place their precious souls! To-day, therefore, I shall try to make clear to such souls that a speedy and easy relapse into sin is

- I. *A certain sign that they are not truly risen by their Easter confession.*
- II. *An almost infallible sign that they did not truly repent when making their Easter confession.*

I. In order to be genuine, our mortal resurrection, from the death of sin to the life of grace, must be conformable in all respects to the resurrection of Christ. “For we are buried with him by baptism into death” (as St. Paul writes to the Romans), “that, as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For, if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6: 4, 5). Here we might ask, why does the Apostle put before us the resurrection of Christ as an example of the conversion of the sinner? Did not Lazarus rise from the dead? And could he not have said that we must begin a new life, just as Lazarus did after his resurrection? There is a great difference between the two cases. It is true that Lazarus rose from the dead; but it is also true that he died again. Such was not the case with our Lord and Saviour. “Knowing,” continues the Apostle,

“that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over him.” Having once left the grave, he returns to it no more. “For in that he died to sin, he died once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God” (Rom. 6: 9, 10).

In the same way, the truly penitent Christian should rise from the grave of sin, not like Lazarus, who died again, but like Jesus Christ who liveth forever. He must persevere in the life of sanctifying grace, and never more willfully return to the grave of his former sins. And that is what the Apostle says: “That the body of sin may be destroyed to the end that we may serve sin no longer” (Rom.6: 6). And he even asks how it is possible that we should again be the servants of sin: “For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?” (Ibid. 2.) How then can we believe that he who is really risen from the death of sin to the life of grace, can so easily return to his former wicked ways? Can he a few days after his Easter confession, bury himself in the same old grave by relapse into his habitual mortal sins? No; it cannot be. He who easily relapses into sin gives clear proof that he did not rise with Christ.

Again, in answer to the question: How do we know that the risen Lazarus was to die again, but not the risen Christ? Christ left his grave-clothes in the sepulchre; but Lazarus did not. In the old slave-days when a galley came to port, all the galley-slaves and passengers landed at once; the former, to purchase provisions; the latter, to stay on shore. Any one accustomed to the discipline of a slaver could say at once who have left the ship for good, and who intend returning to her; for the former were quite free, while the latter were chained, as a sign of their bondage. Sinner, you who have confessed your sins and received Holy Communion this Easter, tell me, in what manner have you risen from the death of sin? Like Christ, leaving behind you all the tokens of sin; or like Lazarus, still bound with the grave-clothes? Have you left the grave, as you would a ship, with all the marks of freedom about you; or do you still wear the chains on your limbs, as a sign of slavery? Are you unable to answer that question? And yet, you must know most about it; for, if you soon resume the ceremonies of the grave, if you again return to the galleys, to the slavery of the devil, you can look on it as a sure sign that you have only risen in outward appearance from the dead, that you are still, like Lazarus, actually bound hand and foot with the winding-bands of corruption.

Finally, the Gospel says, that our Lord always “stood” when he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection: “Jesus stood in the midst of them” (Luke 24: 36), in order to show that the true penitent must stand erect in the state of grace. According to an old custom in the Catholic Church, the *Regina Cæli* is recited thrice a day during Easter time, not kneeling, but *standing*. The holy martyr, St. Justin, who lived in the first ages of Christianity, asks the question: “Whence arises that custom in the Church? “ Would it not be more becoming to pray to God and to his holy Mother on bended knees, than standing? No, he answers, by kneeling, we signify that we have fallen to earth by our sins, and therefore, during Paschal time, we *stand*, in order to show that by the resurrection of Christ and by penance we have risen from our unhappy fall, and must now walk erect in our good resolutions. Such, too, is the meaning of the words of the Apostle to the Galatians: “Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5: 1). And to the Philippians: “Therefore, my dearly-beloved brethren, and most desired, my joy and my crown: so stand fast in the Lord. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4: 1, 7), who stood amongst his disciples, and said to them: “Peace be to you.”

On the other hand, it is a sure sign of wickedness not to progress in the straight path of virtue. The prophet David says: “The wicked walk round about” (Ps. 11: 9). He who walks round and round soon gets giddy and falls; or else he comes back to the place he started from. Inconstant

Christian, who so easily relapse, running as it were, in a circle from sin to confession, and confession to sin! Learn from this that you are not of the number of the truly penitent, but rather of the wicked. You have not really risen with Christ from the death of the soul.

II. With all your confessions, you have not yet done true penance. True repentance calls first and foremost for a real, supernatural sorrow and detestation of sin; and secondly, for a firm purpose of amendment. I am not now speaking of relapse into, or human imperfections, of venial sin. Nor is it my intention to assert that true contrition is through weakness and inconstancy, permits lacking to all those penitents who, after a considerable interval of time, again fall now and then into their former grievous sins. Neither do I wish to say, that it is always and in every case, an infallible sign of a bad confession when one at once relapses into sin; for it may be that one who has truly repented is immediately beset by the devil with an extraordinarily dangerous occasion, and through weakness and inconstancy, permits himself to be led into sin again. I am speaking only of those sinners who constantly and easily fail back into their past sins, after confession, and whose lives are an almost continual relapse; who, when the great feasts of the year come round, keep from sin for a few days, and go to the Sacraments, but quickly relapse into their evil habits of cursing, swearing, drinking, injustice, and impurity. Of these I say, that, generally speaking, it is hardly probable that they have had at confession true sorrow and resolution of amendment,—hardly probable that they have received the grace of God, along with the forgiveness of their sins, and the other helps of the Sacrament. I will prove this in detail.

1. The sorrow required for true repentance must be in its intensity and efficacy necessarily “above everything;” that is that it must surpass all merely natural sorrow. To make this clearer, imagine the case of a young widow, who has but one, beautiful, dearly-loved son. This child is killed by some one. Who can explain the grief of the mother’s heart at the cruel murder? The mere sight of the dagger that did the deed is enough to make her faint away. She cannot bear the sight of her son’s blood-stained clothes or of anything that can remind her of her misfortune. Her heart is ready to break with sorrow; she cannot pass by the place in which the crime was committed. The murderer’s wife, his children, his servants, his friends, although they are quite innocent, are objects of such hatred to her, that she cannot bear to have anything to do with them, If she passes by his house, her blood runs cold; if she hears his name mentioned, she is ready to lose her senses with horror and grief. Perhaps that sorrow and grief is “above everything”? No, answer theologians; it is but a sensible and natural sorrow. The sorrow for sin which is required for penance must be much greater and more powerful. A rich merchant has sent all his goods to an agent in a foreign country. At an appointed time, he sets out to receive his money; but he finds out that his debtors have all gone away and left the place without paying him. Thus, the unfortunate man is reduced to beggary; he has neither goods, nor money, nor bread, nor counsel, nor hope. He tears his hair through sorrow and desperation. Neither in heaven nor on earth can he find any consolation. Perhaps this grief and sorrow, which torments him day and night, is above all? Oh, no, like the other, it is a mere natural and sensible sorrow.

Your sorrow, O sinner, whenever you come to the sacred tribunal of penance laden with mortal sin, must be in its intensity and efficacy, and in its appreciative power, far greater than that of the merchant and the mother. Otherwise, it is of no avail for the forgiveness of sin. Mark well the words, “in its appreciative power;” for it is natural that the murder of her child should cause the mother to feel a keener sensible sorrow, and that the unexpected loss of his goods should affect the merchant in the same way. This natural sensitiveness is not required for the supernatural sorrow of a repentant sinner; and yet, I say, that the latter must in its appreciative power and in its efficacy be greater than the former. That is, I must look on the loss of heaven as greater than the

loss of all temporal goods in the whole world. I must regret the death of my soul more than that of the dearest friends I have on earth. Further, I must abhor offending God more than the worst accident that can happen to me in any way, more than any pain or trouble that can afflict me. My sorrow must be of such a kind that, if I were in the place of the mother or the merchant, and had it in my power to prevent the murder or the loss by a mortal sin, by virtue of my sorrow, I must prefer that the sin should not be committed, rather than the murder or the loss should be avoided. In short, I must be willing to suffer any trouble, pain, and grief, rather than offend God by mortal sin. Now, I ask you, is it likely that a man who has this sincere sorrow for his sins should at once, at the first attack, and without offering any opposition, relapse into the same sins that he has just repented of and detested? If the widow, whose grief at the death of her only son was so excessive, should consent to marry his murderer after four, five, or six days, what would all sensible men think of her? They would say that she had either lost her reason, or that her sorrow was merely apparent and not real. Now, since the sorrow for sin must be much greater than the grief of that mother, nay, than all the natural sorrow of all men, tell me, O sinner, you who so easily fall back into your former sins after confession, and constantly alternate between sin and confession, confession and sin, can you persuade any reasonable man that you detested and hated your sins in the Sacrament of Penance, with that powerful contrition which I have just described? Not even, if you have common sense, could you persuade yourself of such a thing, for your own conscience would contradict you. The very house, the amusement, the person, the drink, the company that led you into sin, would inspire you with horror and aversion, if your repentance were sincere. But if, after confession, instead of abhorring and avoiding them, you go back at once to that house, that company, that person, and commit the same sins over again, I do not believe in your protests of sorrow and repentance. They have not the qualities that stamp them as genuine. Still less had you a firm purpose of amendment.

2. The purpose required for true repentance must be a heartfelt, earnest one, far stronger than all other human resolutions. It must consist of a firm and general determination of the will not, under any circumstances, or for any reason whatever, to offend God by mortal sin. This purpose must further be unconditional. You must be prepared to resist sin, even if all the joys and pleasures, all the riches and treasures of the world were enticing you to commit it; yea, if all men were goading you to sin by threats of the most terrible tortures. And this resolution must be general, that is, it must be for all future time, even if you had a thousand years of life still before you. It must be extended to all places and all circumstances, whether you can foresee them or not. It must be a firm purpose to avoid all occasions and dangers which (as far as you can foresee), are likely to lead you into mortal sin. It must be prepared to use every means in your power in order not to sin grievously again. If you have not this earnest resolution, your purpose, and therefore your repentance, have not the qualities they should have, and it would be better for you not to go to confession under the circumstances. Is it likely, nay, is it possible, that a man who has such a purpose will again abandon his God by sin at the first opportunity, at the least temptation, for the sake of gratifying some brutal passion, or for some worthless thing? Judge yourselves of the matter.

Sinner, when you made a firm resolution in confession, and solemnly protested, before God and his minister that you would never again commit a mortal sin, the priest, who did not rightly know you and your conscience, believed you at first, and looking on you as a true penitent, pronounced the words of absolution over you with much secret joy of heart, for he imagined that he had done a great work in bringing back a stray sheep to the fold. But, after the lapse of a few days, you broke your promise by committing the same grievous sins over again. You went again

to confession, repeated the same promises, and after a short time, again perjured yourself. For the third, fourth, tenth time you said in confession, that you would never sin mortally again! "I am sorry," you exclaimed, "with my whole heart, that I have offended God; henceforth I will show that I am a true servant of his; I would rather die a thousand times than offend him again!" But you never kept your word. And this change from sin to confession, and from confession to sin, has been going on now perhaps for some years. Is that the way you mock the almighty God? Do you think you can persuade him that you have had a real, earnest purpose of amendment? No; no reasonable man could believe that, much less the all-seeing God. Arguing from the lamentable ease with which you relapsed into sin, it is evident that all your confessions were invalid, because you had not a true and firm purpose of amendment, and therefore, which is the third and last proof of your false repentance, that you never obtained the forgiveness of your sins, nor the helps and graces of the Sacrament from God.

The effects of the Sacrament of Penance in souls that are properly disposed, according to the teaching of theologians, are these: Besides sanctifying grace, which makes us friends and children of God, he bestows on our souls those copious helps and actual graces which make them terrible to the demon, so that he can no longer so easily attack and overcome them, and he also arms and strengthens us against our own evil inclinations and temptations, so that we may easily overcome them. Hence, the best advice to be given one who has fallen into mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty is, not to defer repentance and confession for a long time, but at once to be sorry for his sin and confess it. For, while a man is at enmity with God, he is like a fortress in possession of the devil who takes care to garrison it with as many of his soldiers as possible. One mortal sin cannot long remain alone in the conscience, but it continually begets more and more grievous sins; a soul in the state of grace even in the midst of the most violent temptations, can keep itself from sin far easier, than one in the state of sin can avoid committing a new sin, although the latter may be free from all assaults of temptation. This is because of the great weakness and frailty which come from the loss of grace, and of the favor of God.

Therefore, those penitents who keep from mortal sin for a long time after their conversion have in that very fact, an excellent proof that they are in the state of grace. For if they were not, it would be most unlikely, humanly speaking, that they could so long refrain from committing new sins.

But you, who so easily relapse into your former sins after confession, and who continually alternate between confession and sin, you, I fear, have never really repented of your sins with a supernatural sorrow. You have neither the courage nor the power to overcome your evil inclinations, nor to resist temptation; therefore, it is probable you have not received the grace of God in the Sacrament of Penance. You add sin to sin, consequently, your former sins are, presumably, still upon your conscience; and your repentance not a true, but rather, a false one. Hence, if you have been a relapsing sinner for years past, and are now in thorough earnest about your salvation, you have good reason to make a general confession of all your sins, mentioning also the number of times you have been to confession and holy Communion meanwhile, and preparing yourself more carefully than in the past by exciting yourself to true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment.

God grant, however, that in this Easter confession you have truly repented of all your sins, and that you are now in the state of sanctifying grace and in the friendship of God. Oh, what a great and priceless blessing it is for you that the long-suffering and merciful God has borne with you for so many years, and has, at last, admitted you to his favor! But now, I beg of you, above all, be steadfast for the future, and see that you do not, by relapsing into sin, turn the patient mercy of

God into implacable hatred, and lose all hope of future forgiveness. This vigilance and fidelity on your part will be the surest sign that you have risen with Christ from the grave of sin, and regained the freedom of the children of God. You will be able to rejoice as the disciples did when they saw the Lord, cherishing in your hearts the comfortable assurance that you will see him hereafter in heaven, and there rejoice with him forever. Amen.



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