



Taking time to pray the Angelus

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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

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Order and Manner in Which to Do our Daily Work

“The same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods.” Luke 16: 1

What are we in this life? We are all stewards of God the great Master; the goods that he has entrusted to us are our souls and the gifts and graces that he has bestowed on each one of us. What use should we make of them? We should use them to do his holy will, namely, to do what he wishes us to do; that is, each one, besides keeping the commandments of God and the Church, must fulfill the obligations of his state, and perform daily the different duties that are obligatory on him according to the nature of his office or employment. But this alone is not enough; we can be guilty of wasting those goods and good works, like the steward in the Gospel, if we do not attend to them in such a way as to make them bring in as much before God as they ought. How, then, are we to perform our daily duties? I answer

- I. They must be performed when God wills.*
- II. They must be performed as God wills.*

I. The ordinary duties that God expects us to perform according to our different states must be performed when God wills, if we wish to act well and holily; that is, they must be done *at the proper time* and *in due order*. To pray when we should eat; to eat and drink when we should sleep; to sleep when we should work; to work when we should go to church; to observe one order today and another tomorrow—that would be to lead an ill ordered life and to act in a foolish and un-Christian manner, contrary to the will of God. “All things have their season, and in their times all things pass under heaven. A time to destroy and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence and a time to speak.” So, too, should a true Christian divide the day into parts, and according to the nature of his occupations and duties let each work have its appointed hour. And this hour should be fixed, so that he can say at once, without stopping to think: this is the hour for me to rise in the morning; this is the hour for retiring to rest; this is the hour for hearing Mass, for my work, for this or that devotion; on this day in each month I must go to the Sacraments; and so on for everything else he has to do. This order, once it is established, he must observe, nor allow himself to be turned aside from it by any trouble, or levity, or difficulties, or deceit of the devil, unless necessity, or Christian charity, or decency, or weakness and illness, or some affairs of great importance, such as are wont to happen with people in the world, should interfere with it. This is the way to do one’s daily duty when God wills.

Oh, if every one understood how much depends on good order, of what great value and perfection it is in itself, how beautiful it is, how agreeable in the sight of God, and the great merit we acquire by it for our souls, then would those who are in the habit of observing or are compelled to observe it feel great joy and consolation in it; while they who have hitherto attached little importance to it would be encouraged to observe it, and they who on account of the many distractions their business occasions them cannot observe it in all things would at all events try to keep some order in their devotions and spiritual exercises. For, in the first place, a man thus follows the example of our all wise Creator in his external works, since he made all things in measure, number, and weight: "Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight" (Wisdom 11: 21). The sun, the moon, the planets still keep the orderly course he has assigned to them from the beginning. Spring, summer, autumn, winter, day and night succeed each other regularly as God arranged, nor will this order cease till the end of the world.

The less a work comes from our own will and natural inclination, and the more it is in conformity with the will of God, the greater, evidently, must be its merit and perfection. This is the case with the works that I daily perform in due order; for then they are in accordance not so much with my own inclination as with a hard and fast rule which I observe through a kind of obedience promised, as it were, to God. On the other hand, it is the sign of a weak love for God when we serve him irregularly and inconstantly. Tell me; you have a servant at home, who is very diligent when he begins to work, but he is neither regular nor orderly in his ways; you cannot depend on him on account of his peculiar ideas, for he wishes to do all according to his own fancy, and goes from one thing to another as the humor leads him; if he happens to be in a good humor, he will do your bidding; but otherwise there is not the least use in expecting anything from him. What would you think of such a servant? Would he suit you? Suit me? You say; I would rather have no servant at all than such a one. The servant who is not able to do half the work but who is obedient and constant in his efforts to please me, is worth a dozen of the other; for it is an intolerable thing to have to wait till it pleases my servant to attend on me when I want anything done.

It seems to me that this might be well applied to those Christians and servants of God who frequently perform during the week works that are good and holy, but without order or regularity, and in a confused sort of way, not observing any fixed time. Today they get up at five o'clock, because they have no desire to sleep any longer; tomorrow they rise at eight. One day they say their morning prayers with great devotion on their knees, because it suits their fancy to do so; the next day they either omit their prayers altogether, or shorten them considerably. Sometimes they get a fit of piety and hear several Masses one after the other; but when the fit is over, they remain at home and do not go near the church. Today they pray for hours at a stretch, because they happen to feel sensible devotion and spiritual consolation; tomorrow the fervor is no longer there, and the consequence is that they hardly say a rosary properly. They read a spiritual book, because they happen to find one lying about; but when they put it down it may be a whole month before they take it up again. This evening, because they happen to think of it, they make their examen of conscience, and kneel down with their children and servants to say evening prayers, a practice that no good father or mother ever omits, but tomorrow and the next day they will be tired of it. Three times they come to the sermon because it suits them; but six times after that they are among the absentees. This month they go to Holy Communion four times; the next month perhaps not once. Some days they abstain from excessive drinking through mortification, and soon after they begin their old intemperate habits. In a word, they measure out the service they do for God according to their own fancies and to what may come in their way; they do not serve God for his own sake, but for their own pleasure; nor because he so wills it, but because it pleases them to do so now and then. Thus the Lord God must, so to speak, wait for their convenience, and catch them when they are in a good humor. But what pleasure can he find in a service of the sort? For if he were not all-seeing and knew not the future he could never be sure of such service. How can the edifice of Christian holiness and perfection ever be finished, if we by our inconstancy allow what we have built up in one day to fall down the next? All this is caused by the want of order, by not having a certain fixed time marked down for the day's duties. Therefore I repeat, if

you wish to do the will of God in a holy manner and so that it will please him, you must do it when God wills, that is, *at the proper time and in the proper order*. But they must also do them as God wills.

II. By this I mean that our daily work and the duties of our state must not be performed through mere routine, or in a sleepy, slothful, careless manner, but with a cheerful, attentive, and zealous spirit, and with all possible energy and diligence, which must be extended not merely to great and easy matters but also to those which are generally looked down upon and are therefore apt to be performed carelessly or to be omitted. We must not forget the saying: "He that feareth God neglecteth nothing" (Eccles. 7: 19); he does nothing carelessly, but everything perfectly and with holy zeal. To be convinced of the necessity of this we have only to consider that we have a work in hand that we must do for God's sake and to please him. The greater the lord whom we serve, the more worthy he is of honor and homage, the more pleasing the work he desires from us, the greater also must be the diligence employed in the performance of the work if we wish to serve him truly and to earn his favor. A service rendered with unwillingness, that is, as if it were forced from us, and therefore faulty, causes rather disgust and displeasure than feelings of gratitude even with a common man, to say nothing of a rich lord; for it is a sign that the person to whom it is rendered is thought little of, since his will is so sluggishly carried out. And this holds good all the more when the person who has requested the service is looking on while it is being done. Wonderful is the effect of the master's eye and presence with his servants and inferiors. Go into a workshop, and there you will see the apprentices singing and idling away their time; but if the master happens to come in, there is a change at once, the singing is at end, and the work goes on briskly, as if they were vying with one another to see who could do the most. Now, if in addition to that, a good deal of the workman's own success depends on the diligence he employs, certainly he is all the more likely to make a good use of his time; even the hope of a small gain is enough to make a man take his hands out of his pockets and work.

Who is the lord for whom we have to fulfill our daily duties? He is the great, infinite God worthy of all fear and love and service, before whom all that are in heaven and on earth tremble with awe; whom the Angels wait on with veiled countenance; whom all the crowned heads of the world must humbly adore on bended knee as his slaves; whose least sign every creature, animate and inanimate, must obey. Woe to the reasoning being who would dare to perform a service for this great Lord in a careless and imperfect manner? Hear what a terrible curse is pronounced against such servants by the prophet Jeremias: "Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully" (Jer. 68: 10), that is, carelessly. It is a most important thing to do the work of the Lord, and for that very reason accursed is he who does it without proper care and diligence.

If God were like earthly potentates, who can be present in but one place at a time, and who can see only what is going on before their eyes, from whom much can be concealed, and who, generally speaking, are kept in ignorance of what they are most anxious to know, then, indeed, our sloth and carelessness in the divine service, although most unjust, would still be more tolerable. But go where you will in heaven and on earth, you will find no place that is hidden from the eye of God; we are in God; he is on all sides of us; in him we live, move and have our being (Acts. 17: 28). He is looking at us while we are doing our work; he sees how we are doing it; he marks not only the outward movement of the hand, but also and chiefly the heart, the inward zeal, the intention with which we work. It is a source of joy and satisfaction to him to see a zealous servant, who is filled with a holy desire to please him, and is working diligently to that end; while the lazy, careless servant, who works against the grain, only fills him with disgust. This is evident enough from the terrible words of the Apocalypse, "I know thy works; that thou art neither cold nor hot," and because that is the character of them, I can stand them no longer: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (Apoc. 2: 15, 16)

And really, who does it most concern that we perform our daily duties with diligence, if not ourselves? God has nothing and wants nothing from them, except the fulfillment of his will and his outward glory; the whole merit of the work he leaves to us and for us alone is the reward he has in store for eternity. The more perfectly and diligently the work is done, the more pleasing it is in the sight of God; and therefore the greater will be the merit and the reward due to it.

Most people are wanting in fervor, and therefore their works hardly profit them anything. Taking everything into account, there is great cry and little wool; there are many ciphers and few figures; many devotions, but little devotion. In truth, I might say that those duties that are so carelessly performed by most people are like idleness itself, and are nothing more than a waste of time, without merit or profit for the soul. And meanwhile we imagine that we are doing great things for God, heaping up riches and treasures in heaven, and living holy and pious lives, as Christians ought! But we are grievously mistaken. The service of God does not consist in the multiplicity of works; a few things done well are more for his honor and better for our souls than many things done in a perfunctory manner and imperfectly.

It is not enough to do *what* God wills, or to do it *when* he wills; but we must also do it *as* he wills, that is, and we must perform all our duties with all possible diligence and true fervor of spirit. To act as you ought in this respect, say to yourselves before each work, no matter what it may be: this I am now about to do because my Lord and my God wishes me to do it; I can do nothing more pleasing to him just now than this work; he is present and is looking at me to see how I do it. Such a great God, who is worthy of all honor and love, is surely deserving that I should employ on this occasion all the zeal and fervor possible. Think also: a great deal depends for me on this work, and I can by means of it secure an immense reward in heaven; is not that reward worth striving for? But I shall lose it forever if I am careless or slothful now. Act as if on that one work depended all that is in heaven and on earth and, indeed, the least iota of the honor and glory of God is to be preferred to all creatures in heaven and on earth. Act as if you had nothing but this one work to do, and therefore put out of your heads all thoughts of future occupations. Act as if this was the last thing you had to do, as if death were to come immediately after, as might easily be the case, and you had to go into eternity, there to render to your strict Judge an account of all your thoughts, words, and actions. With such thoughts as these in your minds, how is it possible for you to perform your duties without proper zeal and diligence? Oh, if we could only realize what an immense profit we could make for our souls in a single day while we are in the state of sanctifying grace, what great Saints would we not become in the sight of God!

“Work and Pray” (St. Benedict)

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