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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
Sunday After Christmas

Confidence in Prayer

“Who departed not, from the temple, by fasting and prayers serving night and day.” Saint Luke 2: 37.

Simeon, an old priest; Anna, a widow eighty-four years of age, come into the temple at the same time. They were both ignorant of what was to happen to them there, and both had the great joy and glory in their old age, before the end of their lives, to see and know Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Both were anxiously looking out for the redemption of Israel, that is, the advent of the promised Messias. Both were equally confident in the prayers they offered up in the temple for this end. Therefore both had the happiness and great joy to see their Saviour. He who trusts in God shall not be disappointed. Now, if besides constancy we also have confidence in prayer, what may we not obtain from God? Everything that it is possible for us to obtain. For

- I. Confident prayer is the only one to which God can refuse nothing;*
- II. Yet, God is very good in sometimes not hearing our prayers.*

God wishes us to pray to Him as children to a father. And He calls Himself by this name “Father” almost exclusively when speaking of prayer. Our Father who art in heaven. Do you wish to pray? says Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Then go into your room alone, and there call on your Father: “But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee.” “Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it to you.”

With what confidence should we not go to our heavenly Father and pray to Him, who is so loving, so Fatherly. He says of Himself by the prophet Isaias: “Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee; behold, I have graven thee in My hands” (Is. 49: 15, 16). And Christ assures us: “I say not to you that I will ask the Father for you;” that is not necessary, “for the Father Himself loveth you” (John 16: 26, 27); and He is already inclined and most desirous to bestow on you all the graces you wish. And yet we hesitate to trust to such a God! And we are afraid to approach Him with a joyful countenance, lest He should be displeased. Nay, we tremble when we think of Him, and dare not allow ourselves to believe that He means well towards us. We are filled with anguish when we remember the eternity to which we are hastening, and have not courage enough to claim a share in God and in the happiness He has promised in the next life. In a word, we almost despair of ever getting to heaven. O ye of little faith, I must say to such people: Let those who do not serve their God give way to despair and want of confidence; but you who try to serve God and do his will, hope in the Lord.

II. Every promise makes an obligation. What we promise we are bound to fulfill. Hence He who is infinitely faithful, and cannot deceive, must of necessity keep His promise. And truly He will do so; but mark well that He has not bound Himself to hear the prayer that is, as it were, carelessly thrown down before Him. “If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” But how is he to ask? “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind; therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord” (James 1: 5-7). Hence we must pray in faith and without hesitation. In faith, that is, with the confidence of being heard; nothing wavering, that is, not doubting of being heard. Such, too, is the meaning our Lord gives to the word faith when He uses it speaking of prayer: “I say unto you, all things, whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you” (Mark 11: 24). “If thou canst believe,” said He to the father who asked Him to free his son from the dumb spirit, “all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9: 22). “Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee” (St. Matthew 8: 13), said He to the centurion.

We are surprised and sometimes even complain that, although we ask so often and for so many things, we are not heard, in spite of having in our favor that promise of the almighty God, “Ask, and you shall receive.” How does that happen? Ah, when I consider the matter, I find that it is our fault; we know not what we ask for if we ask for heaven and eternal goods, we wish to obtain them without working for them; we cry out daily, “Thy kingdom come,” and by our sinful lives we shut the gate of that kingdom against ourselves. Hence we know not, or better, we do not wish for what we ask. And when we pray for temporal goods, to which our desires generally tend, then we seldom know what we ask for. Therefore God is very good to us when He refuses to hear our prayers, and it would often

be a great misfortune for us if He granted them, to the end that we may learn and know how to pray in a more intelligent, salutary, and useful manner.

How can he who knows not what is good and what evil understand what he prays for when he desires to have the former and to be freed from the latter? Perhaps what he looks on as evil is good, and what he considers good is evil. Hence, if he ventures to entertain such desires, and they are fulfilled, he will find himself disappointed, and must acknowledge, when too late, that he was wrong. He acts just as imprudently as a man born blind who tries to distinguish between colors. For how can he know what is black or white? He is like a traveler quite unacquainted with the country, who on coming to a cross-road determines which to take solely by the appearance of the roads.

How many desired to be freed from some imaginary evil, which after all turned out to their best advantage? How troubled Joseph was while in prison in Egypt! How earnestly he implored the butler to put in a good word for him, that he might be released! But be satisfied, Joseph! You know not what you ask and desire; it is not good for you to be released now; the prison is still the best place for you. If the butler had remembered his promise to Joseph, and entreated Pharao to release him, truly, Joseph's desire for freedom would have been gratified; but then he would have been compelled either to serve some other Egyptian master, or else to return to his own country; and in that case, who would have interpreted the dream that Pharao subsequently had? The two years imprisonment that Joseph still had to suffer was the cause of his being raised to the dignity of viceroy of Egypt, and placed in a position to save so many people from perishing of hunger. Again, in the case of the prodigal, how he longed for the husks that were given to the swine, that he might satiate his hunger with them, and his longing was fruitless! But this very extremity of misery that he suffered was the cause of his at last opening his eyes.

And is it not the same in the world nowadays? I take you yourselves to witness, my dear brethren. Let each of you consider his own experience, and recall to mind those things that he desired most eagerly, prayed for most fervently, and received with the utmost joy and satisfaction, and he will have to acknowledge that those very things were to him frequently a source of uneasiness, chagrin, and difficulty, and that he would have been far better off if he had never received them. That imaginary piece of good luck, that lucrative property, that honorable position, that employment, that profitable business, that you made the object of your earnest desire until you obtained it, like the prodigal in the Gospel, —must you not confess that sometimes it brought you in nothing but envy, jealousy, hatred, persecution, disunion, enmity, trouble and labor, disquiet and anxiety? To what must many a one ascribe his Intolerable domestic trials, his secret anguish, poverty and want, his daily moanings and lamentations, if not to that marriage which, like Samson, he desired as the one thing to complete his happiness, strove for many years, and, at last, secured, with the result that his life is now poisoned by constant hatred and disunion, reviling and cursing, until it is made a hell on earth for him? How many parents have not, like Rachel, wearied heaven with their prayers and devotions to obtain children, or to preserve them in health? And yet those very children, because they were undutiful, or stupid, or weakly and

delicate, were to their parents the source of nothing but disappointment, trouble, and shame. And such you will find to have been the case in many instances which you know better than I can tell you.

Now, if we are so ignorant in things that concern our bodily and temporal welfare, how much less can we know whether the object of our prayers and wishes is good or not for our eternal welfare? Here we must indeed all acknowledge that we are stone-blind. How many would be now in hell for all eternity if they had obtained the health, riches, or honor before men that they longed for, who have actually gained heaven by means of sickness and weakness, poverty and want, contempt and lowliness! How many would now be in heaven, rejoicing with the Angels and Saints of God, if their prayers had not been heard, and if they had not obtained what they so eagerly desired; who, when their prayers for temporal prosperity were granted, began to lead perverse lives, continued therein, and after an unhappy death were hurled into the abyss of hell!

It is often a special gift of God to refuse to hear our prayers, and to withhold from us what we desire. "He sometimes refuses us in his goodness." Through love for us, He denies us what He foresees we should make a bad use of. In what better manner could He show His love for us as our Father, or His skill as our Physician? What does the loving father do when his child cries for a knife? He puts it away at once, and showing the child his empty hand, says: See, there is no knife there. But the child cries out again, there is one on the table. No, says the father; you are mistaken; and he makes a sign to have the knife taken away and hidden. The child still continues to cry; but the father takes no notice, and is determined not to give it the knife. Is that harshness? No, it is fatherly love. The knife is not good for the child. How the poor man ill with fever tumbles and tosses about! He cannot bear anything on him; he tries to get out of bed, and cries out for cold water. Oh, he exclaims, will you let me die of thirst? Am I to be smothered with heat in this bed? What does the doctor do? He pretends to take no notice, and tells the nurse to cover the sick man better still, lest he should die before his time. The sick man does not understand the reason of this, but the doctor does.

God deprives you of consolation by the death of your husband, wife, child, or dear friend; He takes away some pleasure from you by misfortune or loss, whether you like it or not; He gives you that bitter chalice of suffering or calamity to drink, whether it pleases you or not; and meanwhile He allows you to cry, and moan, and sigh to Him for help, and to act like the sick man, but He, like the wise physician, takes not the least notice, since He knows best what is conducive to your welfare. You, indeed, seek what is good for you, but such, too, is the object of His desires. In what does your greatest good consist? You cannot say, because you are a child, a sick man; but God knows all about it, and arranges everything to that end, because He is your Father and Physician. Place yourself, then, and all that belongs to you, in His hands; allow Him to do with you what He pleases, and be assured that everything will turn out for the salvation of your soul. Amen.

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