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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. 4 = THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

How One Should Act after Hearing a Sermon

“Go thou and do likewise.” St. Luke 10: 37.

When Christ had preached the Gospel of to-day and explained to the doctor of the law what he was to do to be saved, and after he had shown him that he should love God with his whole heart and whole soul, and with all his mind and all his strength, he adds: “Do this and thou shalt live.” Again, after having told him that to save his soul he must love his neighbor as himself, and having explained how that is to be done, he adds again: “Go thou and do likewise.” A beautiful conclusion, if the doctor of the law had only taken it to heart and acted upon it: “Go and do.” If Christians nowadays always took to heart the conclusions of the sermons they hear, how much could we not do for the salvation of their souls by our preaching! “Go and do.” But when that is not the case, all our preaching and your listening are of no avail. And this is the fault of the greatest number. But I shall try to prove to you that you must take to heart the sermons you hear. Christ speaks by the mouth of the preacher; you must hear, act, and fear. To-day we have to treat of the principal thing, namely, how we are to go away after the sermon: “Go and do” or

I. We must so take to heart what we have heard, that we will act on it.

II. If we do not do so, we have reason to fear.

I. It is after the sermon that the real good of it is seen; it is then that the first fruits must be reaped. There is a great difference between a sermon and the Mass. If you hear Mass on Sundays and holydays with inward attention and outward reverence, do your part, and, as far as this commandment is concerned, you are not bound to do any more. On the contrary, if you come to a sermon and hear it as you ought, even if you think often of it afterwards, that is not near enough; that is only the smallest and least profitable part of your duty. What still remains for you to do is the most important of all, and everything depends on it, and that is the real observance, the practical fulfillment of the truths you have heard. The Apostle says: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” And that should be the only end and object of your coming to sermons; this is the only fruit that we must derive from them, namely, so to take to heart what we have heard that we are not satisfied with merely speculating upon it, but really act according to it. “Go and do.”

A pious woman was once hurrying home after a sermon when she met a gentleman, hurrying to church in the hope of hearing a part of the sermon, who asked her if it was over yet. No, said the woman, it is not over yet. And how is it, then, asked the gentleman, that the people are coming out of the church in crowds, and do not remain to the end? Because, said she, the preacher has finished his exhortation and has left the pulpit. This answer surprised the gentleman. Are you in your senses, he asked, or do you take me for a fool? I have asked you if the sermon is over, and you said no; and now you tell me that the preacher

has left the pulpit. What is the meaning of that? It is all true, answered the pious woman; I maintain what I said. You must know, sir, that it is one thing for the preacher to have ended his discourse, and another for the sermon to be quite finished. The first concerns the preacher alone, the second concerns both him and his audience, and is certainly not finished for either of them, because what he said to the people from the pulpit has still to be performed by them. So that the sermon is not yet over, nor will it be until the people who have heard it realize its teaching in their lives and actions. There is still a great deal to be done before the sermon comes to an end.

Here we come upon the place where the fault of the greater number lies hidden. The Jews and Pharisees heard the doctrine and preaching of Christ with great attention. "They wondered" (John 7: 15), "but they did not amend their lives." Is not this complaint true of many whom, when going home after the sermon, can only say, with astonishment: What a fine sermon that was! And that is all the good it has done them! Poor preacher! Did all your efforts tend to nothing else but to hear the empty praise: you have preached well? Oh, if that is the case, I pity you; you had better have remained at home in your room and said the Rosary. Is it only for this that you have worked all the week—to hear a few empty words of praise? A fine reward for your labor, indeed! Unfortunate hearer! Have you derived no other profit from the sermon than to be able to say a few words in praise of it? If so, I am sorry that you listened with such patience and attention; it was not worth your while to come away from your house.

How many are there not, also, amongst those Christians who hear sermons, of whom it might be said, with truth: "They admire, but do not amend their lives?" Sermons are preached so often, and what is the result of it all? People come and listen with wonder and pleasure, with desire and longing, but there is not the least improvement in their lives. Sermons are preached against pride, avarice, injustice, immorality, dangerous companions and meetings, envy, vindictiveness, and enmity; against the common habit of swearing and cursing, against backbiting, calumny, rash judgments, impure conversations, drunkenness, vanity in dress, sloth in the divine service, and so forth. But have people become more humble or modest? Have they restored the ill-gotten goods, or the injured character of their neighbor? Do they avoid bad company? Are they more chaste and restrained in their thoughts, desires, language, dress, manner, and actions? Have Christian charity, union, and friendship been established amongst enemies? Is there no cursing or swearing to be heard any more? Is drunkenness at an end? Is there an increase of zeal in the divine service? Would to God that it was so! "They wondered," they have heard and understood well enough; "but they did not amend their ways," they are not a bit better for it.

Have you ever remarked what occurs in a large establishment, in which there are many different people together? All these people have different occupations, according to their different positions: some sit at the fire and warm themselves, others stand and talk together, others drink and play, or merely look on; one of the servants is cleaning the room, another is in the kitchen cooking, a third is spinning or sewing; there is a waiter laying the table, here is some one engaged at his trade; the master of the house is writing or studying, the mistress is occupied with the children, and all the others have their own occupation. Now, suppose that a band of musicians comes before the door and begins to play; at once everybody in the house leaves his or her business; some run to the door, others to the windows and listen with all their ears. How beautiful that is, they say to each other. When the music is over, they return to their former occupations: one to the fire, another to the interrupted conversation, the third to his trade, the fourth to the kitchen. A striking example of what happens to many who hear sermons is the complaint that God makes: "Thou art to them as a musical song...they hear thy words and do them not" (Ezech. 33: 32). The many different occupations of those people mentioned above represent the different vices of the inhabitants of each town and community. One is inclined to one thing, another to another. When the bell rings for the sermon, they all leave their vices for a time; they go to church and hear the Word of God with attention, eagerness and pleasure. They say: That was a good sermon; I could have listened still longer to it. But what is the fruit of it? They all return to their former occupations; they go back to the same vices, the same company, the same habits, the same foul sins, as before. They do not according to what they have heard.

Even many of those who are frightened by the terrible truths they hear from the pulpit do not amend their conduct in the least when the sermon is over. They seem to me like the blind man of Bethsaida, to whom Christ restored sight. Our Lord asked him if he could see anything. He answered: "I see men, as it were-trees, walking" (Mark 8: 24). What do you mean? It seems that you are still blind; trees do not walk; how can men walk like trees? Yet he saw right enough. After being cured by Christ he saw that men are like trees in this world. You may have remarked that when a strong wind blows the trees shake, the branches and leaves begin to tremble as if the whole tree were about to be torn up by the roots. But the roots hold firm: it is only the branches and leaves that are stirred; the trunk remains firmly attached to the ground, or, if it is sometimes blown down, the wind must be very strong indeed. Do we not see the same thing, nowadays amongst Christians? The storm of truth assails their consciences when they listen to a sermon, and moves them, by representing the eternal truths of our faith, the shortness and uncertainty of life, the bitterness of death, the rigor of divine justice, the pains of hell, the joys of heaven. Many are moved, frightened, and made uneasy by these truths; they sigh and tremble like leaves on the trees, and often condemn their own wickedness. But are the roots of their sins torn up? How many of them make good confessions? How many do penance? When and where is the real amendment of their lives to be found? It is only the head that moves with them, not the heart. As soon as the wind is over, when they have forgotten their fear and anxiety, they settle down in the same vices as before; they have strong roots that still fasten them to the earth; that is to say, their sins, of which they do not repent. It should not be so; we must indeed be moved like the trees, but we must not remain stationary like them. We should pull up our sins by the roots, and do and fulfill what we have heard in the sermon. "Christ speaks, we must act." If we do not, there is only one alternative, and that to our great loss: "we have reason to fear."

II. What have we to fear? That the sermons we hear will cause the lessening or the total deprivation of divine grace in this life, and will subject us to a more rigorous judgment and a deeper damnation in eternity. There is no doubt that sermons, preached frequently and zealously, are a great sign of the divine liberality and mercy to a congregation; but do you not think that they are also a means of satisfying the justice and anger of God? That, as they give food and nourishment to some souls, they are poisonous to others; an enlightenment for some, a deprivation of light to others, and that, while they help some to save their souls, they occasion the loss of others? The Word of God is certainly a great blessing for many, who live according to it and are guided by it, and who would be lost eternally without it; but it is also a great curse to others, who, although they hear and believe it, yet do not amend their lives, but remain in their sins. The same rain that ripens the corn for the barn causes the thorns to grow in order to be cast into the fire. In the same way the heavenly rain of the Word of God, when it pours itself upon souls that are well disposed to receive it, makes them grow in virtue and disposes them for heaven; but when it falls upon souls that are filled with the thorns of sinful inclinations, willfully indulged in, without any effort to uproot them, it only hastens on their ruin and destruction.

1. After such long continued ingratitude and obstinacy on the part of the sinner, and such fatherly mercy on the part of God, that punishment is not too severe, that anger and indignation not without just cause! A father who has a bad son, after trying by every means possible to bring him to a sense of duty, when he sees that his efforts are fruitless, is at last compelled, for the sake of his family, to disinherit that son and not to look upon him any more as his child. But how does he do that? In order to free himself from all blame, and to give his son no just cause of complaint, he sends a friend to the latter to explain how disobedient he was, and to tell him of the punishment that is impending over him, although there is no hope that this warning will do any good. Now, who is to be blamed for this disinheriting of the bad son? Is the father to be accused of acting an unfatherly part and of being too severe on his son, or is the son to be blamed because, after repeated warnings, he still perseveres in his wickedness? There is no doubt that the latter has all the fault, and it is only right that he should be disinherited. What, then, are we to think, on the one hand, of God, who calls incessantly, in sermons, on the sinner to repent, and on the other hand of the sinner who hears the call, but does not obey it? What are we to think when we hear that God, after so often warning the wicked Pharaoh, said to Moses: "Go in to Pharaoh;" I know well that he

will not hear nor obey thee, because he is hardened. Nevertheless, go to him and speak to him. What, I ask, am I to conclude from this, except that God is a merciful, patient, and long-suffering Father; and that we are his willful and disobedient children, who abuse his patience so long that the warnings and sermons he so often causes us to hear become the terrible instruments of his anger when he deprives us of our inheritance, because we refused to listen to him.

If we do not do as we are told in sermons, we have reason to fear. What else? The stricter account we shall have to render in judgment. For there is no doubt that more will be expected from him who has received more: The judgment of one who has no excuse to offer will be sharper and more rigorous; and he is less to be excused who was offered graces more frequently, which he neglected to profit by. How will you fare then, sinful Christian? You have shown no sign of improvement after having heard the Word of God so often; how will you fare when an account is demanded of your vices and sins, and of the good that you omitted to do? Alas! Even if the great book were not opened against you to convince you of your wickedness; if both Angels and devils kept away from you, and did not appear against you; if the just Judge himself remained silent and refrained from condemning you, there would still remain another judge to put you to confusion. Hear what Christ says: “And if any man hear my words and keep them not, I do not judge him.” “He that receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him.” “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (St. John 12: 47, 48).

2. And besides that, it will make the pains of hell greater for you for all eternity. For that servant who knew the will of his Lord and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. Ah, my Lord and my God! Do I and so many others ascend the pulpit only to bring down eternal ruin on those souls whom thou wishest to save by our preaching? Must we be a stumbling-block to thy people, to make their fall more dangerous? Must I and others, whose only wish is to bring all those people with us into heaven, appear against them as witnesses on the day of thy justice? Must the truths they have heard from our lips be the voice of one crying out, not in the desert, but in hell, to those unfortunate souls: You knew it, you could and ought to have done it, but you did not wish to do it! What a disappointment for our zeal! What a mistaken charity was ours! We always had the intention and the hope of helping you to save your souls, and behold! Whether we like it or not, we help you to a deeper damnation! Instead of the good thoughts and works that we may have left in many pious souls, many more become more culpable and less deserving of pardon because we have preached to them! Would it not be better for us to remain silent? Should we not renounce preaching? But, if we did, God would be against us, and we should have to utter that eternal woe against ourselves: “Woe is me, because I have held my peace” (Isai. 6: 5), and have not done my duty! Must we then continue to preach? But, oh, terrible thought! By doing so we shall make the sins of some more grievous; from one sermon to another, they will be more inexcusable, and will make their judgment more severe, their hell more intolerable! Must the people then remain away from sermons? Alas, they will be then still more culpable, and they will one day hear the words: “I called and you refused” (Prov. 1:24); I have prepared my light and grace for you, and you did not wish to accept them!

Ah, Christians! If you wished, you could solve this difficulty, and free us from this anxiety and yourselves from this fear. “Christ is speaking to us, let us act.” Let us do the work that, as we have heard in sermons, we ought to do, and then there will be no cause for fear on either side. Go and do, and you will save your souls.

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