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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

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Usefulness of Alms-Giving For the Temporal Welfare of Parents and Children

*“From whence can any one fill them here with bread in the wilderness.”— St. Mark 8: 4.*

Thus did the disciples speak to Christ. We are nearly in the same position. We are bound by the divine and natural law to help the poor and needy with alms. How can we help them all? is the question that some ask; there are such numbers of poor nowadays. And so none of them are helped. The question of others is: Who can give alms in the desert? That is, in such bad times that one has enough to do to provide for himself? And thus very little Christian mercy is shown to the poor, or it is not shown as generously as it should be. That is a clear sign of a want of faith and confidence in the providence, power, and goodness of God. But almsgiving does not lessen, but increases our wealth.

*If you have many children and a small income, yet you can, and even must, give generous alms to the poor; for thereby your worldly possessions will be increased in this life.*

A merchant gives up his business because he has a large family, and he wishes to keep his money; you tell him there are many rich people who are willing to borrow from him at five per cent interest, and to give him security worth ten times the money advanced to them; but he is not moved. He sticks to his former resolution, and says: I will keep my money to support myself and my children, and I will leave them what is over after my death; otherwise I might lose all and become poor. But you would say to him, have you lost your wits? What is the good of allowing your money to lie idle in your coffers? It will grow less every day, and never increase. Lend it at interest, and it will bring in more for you every year. Invest it, if you want to make anything for yourself and your children; for in twenty years you will receive the whole value of your capital in interest alone, and your heirs can receive five per cent for it after your death. What is your opinion of this man? Do you think he acts for the best interests of his children?

But you must form the same opinion of those who are hard and stingy toward the poor, on the pretext that they want their money and bread for their children and their families. What is an alms given to the poor? It is the seed that is cast into fruitful ground, and brings in a hundred-fold. What is an alms? It is money lent at interest, nay, even a divine interest, which returns, not five for a hundred, but a hundred for five. “He that hath mercy on the poor lendeth to the Lord” (Prov. 19: 17). It is God, the Owner of all things, who comes to you in the person of the beggar and the poor man; it is God who takes the alms from you, as a capital borrowed at interest, nay, at usurious interest. Could you find a richer, safer, or more faithful Lord to whom to lend it? Could you have the least fear of being at a loss through him? Can any one be richer than he, of whom God says that he is his Debtor? Do you, perhaps, doubt that? Certainly you do not see the person of God marked on the poor man's forehead. But hear what the Lord says:

“Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me” (St. Matthew 25: 40); and what you refused them, you refused me. Christ is in want when you see a poor person; it is Christ who is hungry and thirsty, who is a beggar and naked. He stretches out his hand for an alms, and even if you give him only a penny, a piece of dry bread, or a drop of cold water, he will not refuse it, but will receive it with gratitude. Jesus Christ cries out at your door: Give an alms, for God’s sake, to this poor man; I will take it from you by his hand. I do not ask from you as much as I have given you. I have shed every drop of my Blood for you, and all I ask of you in return is to give a drink of water to my brethren when they are thirsty. I give you my Body as your food, and I will be satisfied with a piece of bread from you, when my brethren are hungry. I have freed you from the prison of hell, and now I ask you to visit and console me when my brethren are in prison. I have saved you from death, and given you life; do you in turn visit me when my brethren are sick. How powerful with God is the love of the poor, or rather the pleasure he has in almsgiving! “God rejoices in heaven” when a poor man receives a piece of bread on earth, although the poor man is filled with shame at receiving it.

I am not surprised, now, that there were kings and queens who visited on foot the poorest of the sick, fed, washed, and attended to them with their own hands, and served them even on bended knees. Nor am I astonished that many other persons of high position were not ashamed to walk publicly through the streets carrying in their hands a napkin containing food and drink from their own table, that they were bringing to the sick poor; nay, that they were not ashamed to beg for the poor from door to door. If we had only a little real faith, if we could only see, as they did, what a great Lord is concealed under the persons of the poor, we should not wonder at all this! And who amongst you, if he saw Christ himself standing at the door begging for alms, would not look upon it as the greatest honor and happiness to give him what he would ask for? He would even share the last piece of bread, the last penny in the house with his Redeemer. Nor would he allow a servant to do it; he would run at once to the door himself and bareheaded, and with the greatest respect would give his alms to Christ. Is there one amongst you who would send Christ away from his door, with the customary “God help you,” under the pretence that he cannot afford to give alms, or that he wants all he has for himself? I do not think that any Christian could be so hard-hearted. And yet our faith assures us that Christ comes in the person of the poor, and that he receives whatever is given to them. Who, then, should not joyfully embrace every occasion of giving alms that presents itself?

Listen, now, ye of little faith, who are hard and stingy to the poor, through fear of being at a loss by them! “He that hath mercy on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and he will repay him” (Prov. 19: 17). “He that is inclined to mercy shall be blessed; for of his bread he hath given to the poor” (Prov. 22: 9). “He that giveth to the poor shall not want” (Ibid. 28: 27). “Honor the Lord with thy substance; and thy barn shall be filled with abundance, and thy presses shall run over with wine” (Prov. 3: 9). “Give, and it shall be given to you” (St. Luke 6: 38). What shall be given to you? “Good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall they give into your bosom.” Could any promise be plainer or more certain than this? I need not go any farther, for we have experience itself before our eyes to convince us, if we only wish to learn from it. Tell me, have you ever heard any one complain of being poorer, or of having greater difficulty in providing for his children, on account of alms-giving? Go through the whole world, ask, if you can, all the poor, what is the cause of their poverty. Do you think you will find a single one who has been reduced to poverty through practicing the works of mercy? You will find illustrious houses decayed; respectable families ruined; those who inherited great wealth now begging their bread; but I need not tell you why. Nay, many a one is reduced to poverty by the very means that he used with a view of enriching himself. But I never hear of any one becoming poor through alms-giving. Show me a single instance in which a prudent man can complain that he has been deceived in this respect; show me, if you can, children who have been impoverished by the charities of their parents.

On the contrary, I can tell you of numberless cases in which temporal goods have been increased even miraculously, and without the possessor’s knowledge, in the hands of those who gave charity to the poor.

Do you wish to hear of miracles? I venture to say that at all times, almost, and in all places, miracles have happened on account of generous alms-giving! Read the Lives of the Saints, and you will find instances enough in which they, after having given away all they had to the poor, have sometimes found their barns full of corn, their cellars full of wine, and at other times their coffers full of money, although they knew that a short time before they had neither corn, wine, nor money.

It is related in the life of St. Germanus that when he once met some beggars on a journey he told his deacon to share amongst them all the money he had left, which consisted of three dollars. The deacon, not wishing to give it all away, kept one piece back and divided the other two amongst the beggars. On the same evening Germanus received two hundred dollars as a present. See he said to the deacon, let this be a warning to you to lay aside your avarice and to put your trust in God; you have not done faithfully what I told you to do today; if you had kept back nothing we should now be a hundred dollars richer, and should have received three hundred instead of two.

But, you think, these are miraculous things that happen only to holy people! But, I say they are miracles that occur almost daily, as they who are constantly charitable to the poor experience, for they are blessed in a special, though natural manner. For instance, they get a legacy that they never dreamt of. Their business prospers, or they are freed from losses and misfortunes. They recover lost goods, or get back what was taken from them unjustly, and so, in different ways that they hardly notice, God rewards them for their charity to the poor. Yes, alms-giving is the most profitable business! Nor can it be otherwise: our God is most faithful, and the promises he makes on this head are plain enough. Even if that were not the case, he is most noble and generous, and will not allow any man to outdo him in generosity. If you do not believe me, try it yourselves. Engage in that business for a time, with a lively confidence that God will repay you with interest. “Try me in this, saith the Lord, if I open not unto you the flood-gates of heaven, and pour you out a blessing even to abundance” (Malach 3).

But if you do not wish to try it, and if you reject my proposal through fear that you and yours might suffer loss thereby and be brought to poverty, then I tell you, in the name and on the infallible authority of God himself, that you can find no more certain means of incurring the danger you dread—that is, of suffering losses and poverty—than by being hard-hearted or niggardly toward the poor. “He that giveth to the poor, shall not want; he that despiseth his entreaty, shall suffer indigence” (Prov. 28: 29). Sometimes people wonder and complain that with all their labor and trouble they cannot get on; that they fail in business, and suffer losses and misfortunes. How does that happen? I could easily discover the cause of it with some. I should ask them: Are you generous to the poor? Oh, they would say, how can we give much? We want all we have for ourselves. See, that is the reason of it all. When people are niggardly toward God, and refuse to give a penny to a poor man, they lose elsewhere, through the hidden decrees of the Almighty, much more than they save. There can be no luck nor grace where the poor are sent away empty-handed: “He that despiseth his entreaty shall suffer indigence.”

What becomes of your excuses now, Christian parents? You say: I have a large family and a small income, and I cannot give alms. What, have you many children? Then you are in all the greater need of prosperity and temporal wealth and blessings, in order to support and provide for them; is it not so? Invest a part of what you have, so that it may bring you in good interest. You do that sometimes, in spite of your large family, with men who can deceive you. Do you think that God is not able to repay you, if you give your money to him in the persons of his poor? Does he, who is the Creator and Lord of all things, who has so often and so solemnly promised to reward you a hundredfold for your charity and generosity, enjoy less credit with you than a mere mortal? Could you place a better Guardian and Father over your children than the Almighty God? Do you think that he cannot, or will not, protect you and yours, although he protects the ravens and the sparrows, that reap not? Give to God generously in the persons of his poor. “Make over to him the property that you are keeping for your heirs. Let him be the Guardian and Protector for your children. The inheritance that is protected by God is in safety. That is the way to provide for your children’s future.” Have you two children? Then, according to St. Augustine’s advice,

adopt Jesus Christ as the third, and feed him at your table. What an honor it will be for you to be the foster-father of the Son of God, to whom you owe everything! What a happiness for your children to have Jesus Christ as their companion, and to be his brothers and sisters by a new title! Do not turn him away; give him to eat and drink, as if he were really amongst the number of your children. It is not necessary for you to give all you have to the poor, and to keep nothing for yourself. But let Christ have his share. "That is the way to provide for your children's future." Only try it; I assure you, nay, God assures you, that neither you nor yours will suffer any loss by it. The saying still remains true: "Alms-giving never brings poverty. It is the most profitable business of all."

I am ashamed to think that I must exhort Christians to be charitable to the poor, by such a wretched motive as temporal gain; as if I wished to make alms-giving a sort of money-making trade. Our thoughts must rise far higher. If everything in the world were lost to us, the eternal reward of heaven ought to be more than enough for us! And now I conclude with the beautiful, oft-quoted exhortation that the elder Tobias made on his deathbed to his son: "Turn not away thy face from any poor person, and the face of the Lord shall not be turned away from thee. According to thy ability, be merciful. If thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care, even so, to bestow willingly a little. For thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward" (Tob. 4: 7-10) in this world and in the next, which I wish you from my heart. Amen.

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