

Do penance for the kingdom of heaven is at hand

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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 + + +

VOL. 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Remorse of the Dying on Account of Time Lost through Idleness

“But they neglected and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise.” St. Matthew 22: 5.

God has prepared for his Son a marriage-feast in heaven, to which he has invited all men that they may share with him in all imaginable joys; for he sincerely wishes all men to be saved. “He sent his servants to call them that were invited to the marriage: and they would not come.” That is, some do not desire to go to heaven; for of their own accord they hasten to hell, by spending their time in sin and vice. Others are careless about heaven: “They neglected, and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise.” These are the idle, who would indeed willingly come to the heavenly marriage-feast, but they do not wish to put themselves to any trouble about it, since they spend the precious time given them by God for the sole purpose of serving him and gaining heaven in idleness or in useless occupations, or in mere temporal cares, without directing their intentions to God or to the salvation of their souls.

But the time lost in idleness or useless occupations will be a source of remorse, fear, and despair to the dying.

The present time is the time for sowing; the time that God has given us to work out our salvation. The seed is the use we make of that time; the seed of eternity. The fruit cannot be hindered in its growth by bad seasons, heat or cold, rain or inundation, wind or weather, worm or insect. It all depends on how we sow the seed, that is, employ our time. If it is well sown, if our time is well employed, what fruit, what reward may we expect? A kingdom? No; more than that. The whole world, with all its wealth and riches? Ah, if you had gained it and nothing more you would have worked in vain. For everything that passes with time is not worth time.

It is a great blessing for us to use our time well, and an irreparable loss to misspend it. Ask the lost souls to tell us what the loss of time has caused them to suffer. This loss, they say, is as great as the Good from which we are forever excluded; great as our misery; terrible as the fire that the divine anger fans to torment us! If we had back one of those afternoons that we wasted in immoderate drinking, and in playing dice and cards; one of the evenings that we spent in dangerous company; one of the mornings that we lost by lying too long in bed, or in spending too much time in dressing, or in idle thoughts, what would we not do? Ah, we would free ourselves from an unhappy eternity by true repentance, and gain a joyful eternity in heaven! But in vain do we expect that much! We must go on in our despair! There is not an hour or a quarter of an hour, or a minute, or a moment for us! Our tears and sorrow are too late! During our lives we could thereby have freed ourselves from everlasting misery; now time is no more for us!

How great will be the mental anguish and pain that will pierce the heart of the dying man who has passed a lifetime in useless occupations or idleness, doing nothing for his soul; and what will his feelings be when he looks back on the years he has wasted. I have lived twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or more years. All this beautiful time is over. In any moment of it I could have gained eternal glory in heaven! Would that I had abstained from sin! Would that I had always kept in the grace of God! Would that I had been more regular in receiving the Sacraments, in making use of the golden opportunities afforded me, in performing works of charity and mercy! What a rich treasure of merit and eternal joys I should have amassed, that the just Judge would give me now! But alas! It is too late, and I have lost all forever! Poor and naked I must go into the house of my eternity, while others, amongst whom I might have been, enter it with joy and exultation, as the Lord says: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Going they went and wept, casting their seeds. But coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves" (Ps. 125: 5-7). And I must look on with empty hands and tearful eyes!

Oh, vanished years! Where are ye? If I could only call you back now! Unhappy me! I must exclaim with that secretary of Francis I, king of France, as he lay on his death-bed; unhappy me! I have spent so many years, and used up so many reams of paper in the service of my king; would that I had spent but one day and used but one sheet of paper to write thereon a general confession for the good of my poor soul! Would that I had but one hour of the many I have wasted, that I might regain lost time and appease my Judge before I die. But, to my grief and sorrow, I cannot now expect another moment of time! I hear resounding in my ears the words: "Time shall be no longer" (Apoc. 10: 6), the season for sowing is gone by; not a grain can be planted any more with the hope of a harvest. Torments and despair will await me in hell. In this condition of fear and anguish will depart the soul of the man who has wasted his time during life in idleness or in vanities useless for his salvation.

This wholesome thought, which comes too late for the dying, is meant for us who are still alive and well, and can still make a good use of the present time. We must therefore make provision now, that we may not on our death-beds have cause to fear a long eternity of despair and wailing. "The present time is the time for sowing." What is not sown then can never bear fruit, nor be garnered in, but is and remains lost forever. The present time is not a time for idling or loitering; it is not a time for useless talk, amusements, gambling, long sleep and vain pleasures, much less for sin and vice; for it is intended by God for the sole purpose of working out the salvation of our immortal souls, and preparing ourselves for a happy death. How foolish to hear people say: let us talk to pass away an hour; let us play, amuse ourselves, walk about to pass away the time. And have you nothing better to do? Is that the way to use the time that the Creator has granted you to do penance, to obtain pardon, to acquire grace, to merit glory? Will you waste in useless talk and frivolity the precious hour that God has given you for such a lofty purpose? What must we think when we hear young people, especially when they are of different sexes, say to each other in their young years: "Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine, and ointments; and let not the flower of the time pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered" (Wisd. 2: 6, 8).

Oh, foolish mortals! What are you saying? If you saw a gardener picking the blossoms off the trees in spring, and making them into a nosegay because they are beautiful, what would you think of him? You would say that he is either mad or an unfaithful servant, inasmuch as he thus destroys all prospects of fruit. Is not that the case? Because it is from the blossom that the fruit has to come, and if that is destroyed there can be no fruit. "Let not the flower of the time pass by us," you say; what are the flowers, the blossoms of this time? They are the works done in this life, from which the fruit is to grow for eternity; if you break off these blossoms, and use the time only for your own comfort, sensuality, and pleasure, what sort of fruit can you have from time for eternity? Certainly no other but the sad and despairing remembrance of lost time.

There is no lively faith in those idle men. Experience teaches in countless ways that human life is very short; that its years are uncertain; that God has appointed for one ten, for another twenty, for a third thirty, forty, fifty years; that no one knows how many years he has to live. Now, if we only believed practically, and often reflected deeply on the fact that on the good or bad use of this uncertain time depends eternal happiness in heaven or eternal misery in hell, would it be possible for a Christian who professes to fear hell and desire heaven to squander away so wretchedly the beautiful time of his life, instead of using it to work out his salvation?

“Therefore, whilst we have time let us work good” (Gal. 6: 10). Such is the conclusion to which St. Paul exhorts us. Nothing remains of the time that we have lived up to this; perhaps the greater part of it has been wasted; and, once for all, the time that we do not devote to God and our soul is lost forever. Oh, how great the loss of all the graces and merits we might have gained in that time! But as we cannot recall it, let us at least try to make up for it by renewed diligence, like the traveler who, having lost his way in the forest and wandered about for hours on the wrong path, walks much quicker when he has found out his mistake, in order to arrive at his destination in time. The time we have still to live is uncertain, and will pass like an arrow shot from a bow. God has appointed the moment of our death as the end of our time. The sinner in hell hates God, curses, blasphemes, and commits other sins; yet his torments are not increased on that account, because he has reached the term of time during which he could merit punishment by sin. A just soul in purgatory practices the most perfect faith and hope regarding the joys of heaven it has not yet seen; it hopes for salvation as firmly as if it had already gained it; it loves God above all things, although it feels the weight of his chastising hand; it is fully resigned to God’s will in its severe torments; yet by all those virtues which it practices every moment it does not lessen or shorten its punishment, nor bring itself a step nearer to heaven. Why? Because it has already passed the term during which it could merit. “The dead know nothing more; neither have they a reward any more” (Eccles. 9: 5). They receive their reward of what they have done during life, and it is according to that that God will pay them. But they have no further reward to expect for what they do after death. Hence, as our merits shall be in the last moments of our lives, so also shall our reward be; and after that moment we shall not have another to make a good confession, to awaken sorrow for our sins, to gain an indulgence or to acquire grace. If an angel were to come and tell us the day of our death, saying to each one in particular: you have still a year to live; you, half a year; you, three months; you, four weeks; you, five days; after that time shall be no more; how should we act during that time? How carefully we should purify our conscience, if it accused us of any sin! How we should avoid all dangerous occasions! How diligently we should perform the duties of our state! In a word, how zealous we should become in the divine service! Why do we not do all this now, since we are not sure of a single moment in the day? Why do we put off our conversion to a future time, which perhaps we shall never see?

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