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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. 5 - THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Consolation to Be Derived from the Resurrection in the Trials of Life

“He showed them his hands, and his side.”— John 20: 20.

Our Lord had frequently assured his Apostles that he would rise from the dead; they had the testimony of the angel, of the holy women, and of the soldiers on guard, and of a number of disciples who had seen him alive and spoken to him after the resurrection. Still, they were so filled with doubt and fear that they hardly knew what to think. Could he be really risen? They half doubted, half believed it. Thomas had fully made up his mind not to believe: “I will not believe” (John 20: 25), he said. Then Jesus, to remove all hesitation from their minds, appeared to them again and “showed them his hands and his side,” as if to say: do you not yet believe? See, here are my hands with the wounds made by the nails which fastened me to the cross; here is my side pierced by the lance, with my heart still open. Then at last the disciples were convinced. “The disciples, therefore, were glad when they saw the Lord.” Christ is truly risen; we have no doubt of it; we all acknowledge and confess it; nor can any Catholic doubt that it is an equally certain truth that, as Christ is risen from the dead, so we, too, shall one day arise from the dead. What a comfort for us in adversity and tribulation, what an encouragement in all the difficulties of life, to think: I shall one day arise to everlasting life!

And this is the consolation I mean to speak of to-day.

Faith and hope in the future resurrection to eternal life can and should encourage us to overcome all difficulties, and to bear cheerfully all trials and voluntary mortifications.

If the hope of recovering his health, suggested by the doctor who gives him the medicine, is a source of consolation to the sick man who has lain in bed for whole months, and gives him

courage to bear the discomforts of illness for a time longer; if the promise of freedom causes such joy to the prisoner that he bears much easier the severities of his prison, how much more should not a believing Christian be encouraged by the certain and infallible hope of a resurrection to an eternal, immortal, and perfectly happy life; so that he should bear with consolation and joy for a time longer the miseries of this short life, and willingly suffer with his suffering Lord?

We have sometimes many discomforts and miseries to suffer here, it is true; but what does it matter? Our suffering lasts but for a short time; so that we have just reason for adding to the discomforts of the body every day; for we are assured by God himself that we shall rise again in the same bodies and live forever. And provided we have suffered here with our suffering Lord, what shall the bodies be like in which we shall arise? They shall not be mortal, corruptible, faulty, subject to heat, cold, hunger, thirst, weariness, and countless maladies and miseries, as they are now; but, according to St. Paul: “the dead shall rise again incorruptible: and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption: and this mortal must put on immortality” (1Cor. 15: 52, 53). The weak body shall become strong, the sickly healthy, the deformed beautiful, the wasting incorruptible, the suffering impassible; to say all in a few words: our bodies shall resemble the glorified body of Christ himself, for “we look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowliness, made like to the body of his glory.” And where shall my body thus live in beauty and glory? In what land shall it dwell? Our Saviour himself answers us: “Where I am, there also shall my minister be” (John 12: 26); namely, in heaven, in the land of those joys and pleasures that no human eye has seen or heart can conceive; in riches without any fear of losing them; in dignity without envy; in rest without disturbance; in sweet love without jealousy; in authority without care or trouble; in satiety without disgust. Where I live, there must my servant live with me. Should not this hope impel us to crucify and chastise our body with its sensuality, after the example of the crucified and suffering Jesus, that we may be admitted to the companionship of his glory and majesty? Should not this hope at least encourage us to bear all the crosses and trials of this life with cheerfulness and patience for God’s sake? What harm can all human suffering and misery do us since we expect such a great and glorious happiness? What injury have we to fear from any accident or misfortune since in the next life we shall possess all goods in abundance? What can death, with all the illnesses that may precede it, take away from us, since we have the certain hope that this very body of ours, although it must decay in the earth for a time, shall rise again complete and live forever in a glorious eternity?

Holy Job, who, although he lived long before the time of our Lord, was not only infallibly certain in his faith, but was also filled with consolation by his hope. What made him so patient under his many sufferings and calamities, the least of which could have vanquished the greatest hero and thrown him into despair? Consider for a moment that wonderful man who was renowned in the Orient: “This man was great among all the people of the East” (Job 1: 3), whom the world for a long time beheld in the enjoyment of all its goods and riches, its honors and comforts, surrounded by an illustrious and numerous family, waited on by a crowd of servants, honored by strangers as well as friends, in a word, fenced in, as Satan reproached him with in the presence of God, by temporal prosperity and happiness: see how in a moment he is reduced to beggary, all his cattle driven off by the enemy, his property destroyed by fire, his servants gone from him to find other masters, his houses thrown to the ground by the wind, his children crushed to death, he himself abandoned to all the rage and wantonness of the devil, and stricken in his body with such a grievous sore that he looked like a monster of deformity and a mass of

corruption. In this extreme necessity, abandoned by his friends, mocked and cursed by his own wife, he was forced by the intolerable smell of his sores to go forth from the house and sit on the dunghill and scrape off with a potsherd the matter that flowed from his suffering body. Even the very stones might have pitied his miserable state! And yet in the midst of all these calamities, the bare mention of which makes us shudder, he sat there consoled and contented, blessing and praising God! Compelled by a natural feeling of sorrow, Job will indeed sometimes groan and sigh and complain and long for death; but never will he forget his dutiful obedience, submission, and respect for the Almighty God. He will encourage himself with his hope, and say: I can see the dunghill on which I am sitting, the worms that creep out of my sores, and the decaying flesh that falls from my bones; but at the same time "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth: and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God." "This, my hope, is laid up in my bosom" (Job 19: 25, 28).

What do you think of this, delicate Christians! Who are so diligent in seeking your comfort, and cannot bear the least mortification? What do you think, pusillanimous and despairing souls, who complain so impatiently under the trials and crosses of life, as if all were lost? If misfortune or poverty deprives you of some temporal good, if sickness attacks and confines you to bed, if father or mother, husband or wife, child or friend is carried off by a premature death, or if the danger of death threatens you yourself, is all lost therefore? Nay, have you suffered any loss whatever? Let those complain of whom the Apostle speaks, those who have no hope, no expectation of a happy resurrection. Truly they have reason to complain, to murmur, to despair. But you, my dear brethren, who bear this hope about with you, why should you be disturbed at the loss of worldly goods, of earthly comforts, of a fickle health, of a mortal body? All these things are "momentary and light" (2 Cor. 4: 17); they will be restored to us hereafter in far greater perfection with the assurance of never losing them for eternity.

What an agreeable sight it must have been before heaven to behold the seven Machabees, maimed in hands, feet, ears, and tongue, joyfully offering their mutilated bodies to be roasted alive! And the mother looking on at the martyrdom of her sons, not like the mothers of to-day, who weep and moan if the least accident happens to their children, kept on crying out to them full of joy and consolation: Raise your eyes to heaven, my dear children! Let them burn and maim you as they will: "The Creator of the world will restore to you again in his mercy both breath and life, as now you despise yourselves for the sake of his laws."

They had but the light of the Old Law, and we, in the full blaze of the noon-day sun of the Gospel, show by our actions that we are blinder than they! What a shame for us who make profession of a religion which adores a crucified God who rose again from the dead, to be so weak and tender about ourselves, so anxious to fly the cross, so fearful of the least discomfort, not to speak of death itself, as if we had no faith in the resurrection! Anaxagoras was called on to defend himself against a man who wished to deprive him of a splendid property he had. "What!" he exclaimed; "are a few acres of land worth so much trouble? If I have to go to law it must be for something worth while." All his friends were indignant that he was so careless in such a matter, in which others were wont to spare no trouble; whereupon he raised his eyes to heaven, and pointing upwards, said: "That, that is my country, that is my inheritance; it is for the things that are there I care, not for those that are on earth." Could a Christian have given a better answer than that heathen? Meanwhile many of us have fine words on our lips, but quite different desires in our hearts, showing that we care far more for the things of earth than for the eternal goods that are above.

If we only had a lively faith and hope in the glory of the resurrection, we should rejoice when poverty takes away our temporal goods, or sickness or voluntary mortification weakens our bodies. We should think and say with a certain leper: "See, the fetters that keep me on this wretched earth are loosened more and more every day, so that I shall arrive in my fatherland all the quicker." A nobleman who had lost his way out hunting found himself alone in a forest, and knew not how to get out or what to do. Suddenly he heard a most sweet voice singing. Where can the song come from? He thought. Is it an angel's voice or that of a human being? He spurred on his horse and rode towards the voice; and behold there came out of the thicket a poor, ragged leper, so misshapen and deformed that the nobleman could hardly bear to look at him; meanwhile the leper kept on pulling off the decaying flesh from his body. "Poor wretch!" exclaimed the noble; "who was singing so sweetly in the forest a few moments ago?" "It was I, sir," answered the leper. "What!" said the other; "can you, who have such cause to weep and lament, sing so cheerily?" "Yes, indeed! I have been singing through sheer joy and consolation; do you wish to know why? I know that the only wall that keeps me from heaven is this miserable body of mine; now the more I see it decay the nearer I come to the fulfillment of my hope that the wall will soon fall down altogether, and so I shall gain the rest and repose I long for. That is the reason why I sing so cheerily and bless God, who now mortifies my flesh, that he may restore it to me afterwards in another guise."

Would that we had only a lively faith and hope! But there is where we are at fault! The inordinate love we have for our flesh and sensuality, the inordinate desire of temporal things has so dimmed the faith in our hearts, that the future glory of the resurrection awakens in us but little pleasure, desire, or courage; or else if faith has still left some hope in us we try to persuade ourselves that we may arrive at that glory by an easier, more comfortable way than the rude way of penance and the cross, which Christ, our head, and all his saints have traveled. Oh, truly that is a self-deception that brings many a soul on the broad way that leads to hell! If Christ had found a more comfortable way to heaven than the way of penance and the cross he would certainly have chosen it, or at least have pointed it out to us, whom he loves even to death. But, "ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into his glory" (Luke 24: 26)? Then have we nothing better to hope for? Certainly not; the Apostle assures us: "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6: 5). Must we then necessarily suffer here below? Yes. Then I will suffer here, either by voluntary mortification of my body or by patiently bearing the crosses and trials which God will send me; and I shall be comforted and strengthened in this resolution by the certain hope of a resurrection to eternal glory.



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