

# THE SERMONS OF ST. JOHN MARY VIANNEY

## No. 7

### BE RELIGIOUS OR BE DAMNED!

There is always the person who says to me: "What harm can there be in enjoying oneself for a while? I do no wrong to anyone; I do not want to be religious or to become a religious! If I do not go to dances, I will be living in the world like someone dead!"

My good friend, you are wrong. Either you will be religious or you will be damned. What is a religious person? This is nothing other than a person who fulfils his duties as a Christian.

You say that I shall achieve nothing by talking to you about dances and that you will indulge neither more nor less in them.

You are wrong again. In ignoring or despising the instructions of your pastor, you draw down upon yourself fresh chastisements from God, and I, on my side, will achieve quite a lot by fulfilling my duties. At the hour of my death, God will ask me not if you have fulfilled your duties but if I have taught you what you must do in order to fulfil them. You say, too, that I shall never break down your resistance to the point of making you believe that there is harm in amusing yourself for a little while in dancing? You do not wish to believe that there is any harm in it? Well, that is your affair. As far as I am concerned, it is sufficient for me to tell you in such a way as will insure that you do understand, even if you want to do it all the same. By doing this I am doing all that I should do. That should not irritate you: your pastor is doing his duty. But, you will say, the Commandments of God do not forbid dancing, nor does Holy Scripture, either. Perhaps you have not examined them very closely. Follow me for a moment and you will see that there is not a Commandment of God which dancing does not cause to be transgressed, nor a Sacrament which it does not cause to be profaned.

You know as well as I do that these kinds of follies and wild extravagances are not ordinarily indulged in, but on Sundays and feast days. What, then, will a young girl or a boy do who have decided to go to the dance? What love will they have for God? Their minds will be wholly occupied with their preparations to attract the people with whom they hope to be mixing. Let us suppose that they say their prayers—how will they say them? Alas, only God knows that! Besides, what love for God can be felt by anyone who is thinking and breathing nothing but the love of pleasures and of creatures? You will admit that it is impossible to please God and the world. That can never be. God forbids swearing. Alas! What quarrels, what swearing, what blasphemies are uttered as a result of the jealousy that arises between these young people when they are at such gatherings! Have you not often had disputes or fights there? Who could count the crimes that are committed at these diabolical gatherings? The Third Commandment commands us to sanctify the holy day of Sunday. Can anyone really believe that a boy who has passed several hours with a girl, whose heart is like a furnace, is really thus satisfying this precept? St. Augustine has good reason to say that men would be better to work their land and girls to carry on with their spinning than to go dancing; the evil would be less. The Fourth Commandment of God commands children to honour their parents. These young people who frequent the dances, do they have the respect and the submission to their parents' wishes which they should have? No, they certainly do not; they cause them the utmost worry and distress between the way they disregard their parents' wishes and the way they put their money to bad use, while sometimes even taunting them with their old-fashioned outlook and ways. What sorrow should not such parents feel, that is, if their faith is not yet extinct, at seeing their children given over to such pleasures or, to speak more plainly, to such licentious ways?

These children are no longer Heaven-bent, but are fattening for Hell. Let us suppose that the parents have not yet lost the Faith.... Alas! I dare not go any further! .... What blind parents! .... What lost children! .... Is there any place, any time, any occasion wherein so many sins of impurity are committed as the dancehalls and their sequels? Is it not in these gatherings that people are most violently prompted against the holy virtue of purity? Where else but there are the senses so strongly urged towards pleasurable excitement? If we go a little more closely into this, should we not almost die of horror at the sight of so many crimes which are committed? Is it not at these gatherings that the Devil so furiously kindles the fire of impurity in the hearts of the young people in order to annihilate in them the grace of

Baptism? Is it not there that Hell enslaves as many souls as it wishes? If, in spite of the absence of occasions and the aids of prayer, a Christian has so much difficulty in preserving purity of heart, how could he possibly preserve that virtue in the midst of so many sources which are capable of breaking it down? “Look,” says St. John Chrysostom, “at this worldly and flighty young woman, or rather at this flaming brand of diabolical fire who by her beauty and her flamboyant attire lights in the heart of that young man the fire of concupiscence. Do you not see them, one as much as the other, seeking to charm one another by their airs and graces and all sorts of tricks and wiles? Count up, unfortunate sinner, if you can, the number of your bad thoughts, of your evil desires and your sinful actions. Is it not there that you heard those airs that please the ears, that inflame and burn hearts and make of these assemblies furnaces of shamelessness?”

Is it not there, my dear brethren, that the boys and the girls drink at the fountain of crime, which very soon, like a torrent or a river bursting its banks, will inundate, ruin, and poison all its surroundings? Go on, shameless fathers and mothers, go on into Hell, where the fury of God awaits you, you and all the good actions you have done in letting your children run such risks. Go on, they will not be long in joining you, for you have outlined the road plainly for them. Go and count the number of years that your boys and girls have lost, go before your Judge to give an account of your lives, and you will see that your pastor had reason to forbid these kinds of diabolical pleasures! .... Ah, you say, you are making more of it than there really is! I say too much about it? Very well, then. Listen. Did the Holy Fathers of the Church say too much about it? St. Ephraim .tells us that dancing is the perdition of girls and women, the blinding of men, the grief of angels, and the joy of the devils. Dear God, can anyone really have their eyes bewitched to such an extent that they will still want to believe that there is no harm in it, while all the time it is the rope by which the Devil pulls the most souls into Hell? .... Go on, poor parents, blind and lost, go on and scorn what your pastor is telling you! Go on! Continue the way you are going! Listen to everything and profit nothing by it! There is no harm in it? Tell me, then, what did you renounce on the day of your Baptism? Or on what conditions was Baptism given to you? Was it not on the condition of your taking a vow in the face of Heaven and earth, in the presence of Jesus Christ upon the altar, that you would renounce Satan and all his works and pomps, for the whole of your lives—or in other words that you would renounce sin and the pleasures and vanities of the world? Was it not because you promised that you would be willing to follow in the steps of a crucified God? Well then, is this not truly to violate those promises made at your Baptism and to profane this Sacrament of mercy? Do you not also profane the Sacrament of Confirmation, in exchanging the Cross of Jesus Christ, which you have received, for vain and showy dress, in being ashamed of that Cross, which should be your glory and your happiness?

St. Augustine tells us that those who go to dances truly renounce Jesus Christ in order to give themselves to the Devil.

What a horrible thing that is! To drive out Jesus Christ after having received Him in your hearts! “Today,” says St. Ephraim, “they unite themselves to Jesus Christ and tomorrow to the Devil.” Alas! What a Judas is that person who, after receiving our Lord, goes then to sell Him to Satan in these gatherings, where he will be reuniting himself with everything that is most vicious! And when it comes to the Sacrament of Penance, what a contradiction is such a life! A Christian, who after one single sin should spend the rest of his life in repentance, thinks only of giving himself up to all these worldly pleasures! A great many profane the Sacrament of Extreme Unction by making indecent movements with the feet, the hands and the whole body, which one day must be sanctified by the holy oils. Is not the Sacrament of Holy Order insulted by the contempt with which the instructions of the pastor are considered? But when we come to the Sacrament of Matrimony, alas! What infidelities are not contemplated in these assemblies? It seems then that everything is admissible. How blind must anyone be who thinks there is no harm in it! ....

The Council of Aix-la-Chapelle forbids dancing, even at weddings. And St. Charles Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan, says that three years of penance were given to someone who had danced and that if he went back to it, he was threatened with excommunication. If there were no harm in it, then were the Holy Fathers and the Church mistaken? But who tells you that there is no harm in it? It can only be a libertine, or a flighty and worldly girl, who are trying to smother their remorse of conscience as best they can. Well, there are priests, you say, who do not speak about it in Confession or who, without permitting it, do not refuse absolution for it. Ah! I do not know whether there are priests who are so blind, but I am sure that those who go looking for easygoing priests are going looking for a passport which

will lead them to Hell. For my own part, if I went dancing, I should not want to receive absolution not having a real determination not to go back dancing.

Listen to St. Augustine and you will see if dancing is a good action. He tells us that “dancing is the ruin of souls, a reversal of all decency, a shameful spectacle, a public profession of crime.” St. Ephraim calls it “the ruin of good morals and the nourishment of vice.” St. John Chrysostom: “A school of public unchastity.” Tertullian: “The temple of Venus, the consistory of shamelessness, and the citadel of all the depravities.”

“Here is a girl who dances,” says St. Ambrose, “but she is the daughter of an adulteress because a Christian woman would teach her daughter modesty, a proper sense of shame, and not dancing! “

Alas! How many young people are there who since they have been going to dances do not frequent the Sacraments, or do so only to profane them! How many poor souls there are who have lost therein their religion and their faith! How many will never open their eyes to their unhappy state except when they are falling into Hell! ....

### **YOUR PRAYERS ARE ONLY AN INSULT**

There are some who derive satisfaction from the virtues they practice because their tendencies are all that way. For example, a mother will pride herself on the fact that she gives some alms, that she frequents the Sacraments, that she even reads some spiritual books—yet she sees without dismay that her children are keeping away from the Sacraments. Her children do not make their Easter duty, yet this mother, from time to time, gives them permission to go to amusements, to dances, to weddings, and sometimes to the winter gatherings. She loves to see her daughters appearing in public; she thinks that if they do not frequent these places of debauchery, no one will know them and they will not be able to find themselves husbands and homes. Yes, undoubtedly they would be unknown—but only to the libertines. Yes, my dear brethren, they will not find themselves husbands from among those who would treat them like the most wretched slaves. This mother loves to see them well turned out; this mother loves to see them in the company of some young men who are wealthier than they are. After certain prayers and some good works, which certainly she will do, she thinks herself to be on the road to Heaven.

Carry on, my good mother; you are only a blind hypocrite; you have only the appearance of virtue. You set your mind at rest with the thought that you make some visits to the Blessed Sacrament; without any doubt that is a good thing; but your daughter is at a dance; but your daughter is at the cabaret with libertines, and they will be spewing out nothing but one kind or another of indecency; but your daughter, tonight, is in a place where she should not be. Go away, blind and abandoned mother, go out and leave your prayers. Do you not see that you are doing as the Jews did, who bent the knee before Jesus Christ to make a semblance of adoring Him? So, then, you come to adore God, while your children are out to crucify Him.

Poor blind creature, you do not know either what you say or what you do. Your prayers are only an insult which you offer to God. Begin by going to find your daughter, who is losing her soul; then you may return to God to ask Him for your conversion.

A father thinks that it is quite enough to maintain good order in his house; he will not have anyone swearing or using obscene words. That is very good. But he has no scruple about allowing his boys to go to amusements, to fairs, and all sorts of pleasures like that. This same father permits work to be done on Sundays on the slightest pretext, even such as not to go against the wishes of his reapers or his threshers. However, you see him in church adoring God, even prostrate before Him: he is trying to avoid the slightest distraction. But tell me, my friends, how do you suppose God can look upon such people as that? Carry on, my poor friend, you are blind. Go and learn your duties and then you may come to offer your prayers to God. Do you not see that you are doing the work of Pontius Pilate, who recognised Jesus Christ and who yet condemned Him? You will see this other man, who is charitable, who gives alms, who is touched by the poverty of his neighbour. That is quite good. But he allows his children to live in the greatest ignorance. Perhaps they do not even know what they should do in order to be saved. Go along, my poor man. You are blind. Your alms and your sympathy are leading you, with great steps, straight to Hell. Here is another who has plenty of good qualities. He likes to help everyone. But he cannot tolerate his unfortunate wife or his poor children, upon whom he heaps insults, and possibly even ill-treats. Carry on, my friend, your religion is worth nothing.

This one thinks that he is quite good because he is not a blasphemer or a thief, or even unchaste, but he goes to no

trouble at all to correct those thoughts of hatred, of revenge, of envy, and of jealousy which fill his soul almost every day. My friend, your religion can only ruin you.

We see others, too, who are all full of pious practices, who become full of scruples at omitting some prayers they usually say. They would think themselves lost if they were not at Holy Communion on certain days when they have the habit of receiving, but trifles make them impatient and grumblers. A mere word which they did not care for will fill them with coldness and dislike. They will have difficulty in being civil to their neighbour; they will want to have nothing to do with him; on different pretexts, they will avoid his company; they will find that someone has been behaving badly in respect of them.

Go away, you poor hypocrites, go and become converted; after that you may have recourse to the Sacraments, which, in your state, without knowing it, you are only profaning with your wrongly understood devotion.

### **PURITY IS NOT KNOWN**

Alas, my dear brethren, how little purity is known in the world; how little we value it; what little care we take to preserve it; what little zeal we have in asking God for it, since we cannot have it of ourselves. No, my dear brethren, it is not known to those notorious and seasoned libertines who wallow in and trail through the slime of their depravities, whose hearts are .... roasted and burned by an impure fire .... [sentence incomplete - Trans.] Alas, very far from seeking to extinguish it, they do not cease to inflame it and to stir it up by their glances, their desires, and their actions. What state will such a soul be in when it appears before its God! Purity! No, my dear brethren, this beautiful virtue is not known by such a person whose lips are but an opening and a supply pipe which Hell uses to vomit its impurities upon the earth and who subsists upon these as upon his daily bread. Alas! That poor soul is only an object of horror in Heaven and on earth! No, my dear brethren, this gracious virtue of purity is not known to those young men whose eyes and hands are defiled by glances and .... [sentence incomplete - Trans.] Oh God, how many souls does this sin drag down to Hell! .... No, my dear brethren, this beautiful virtue is not known to those worldly and corrupt girls who make so many preparations and take so many cares to draw the eyes of the world towards themselves, who by their affected and indecent dress announce publicly that they are evil instruments which Hell makes use of to ruin souls—those souls which cost so much in labours and tears and torments to Jesus Christ! ....

Look at them, these unfortunates, and you will see that a thousand devils surround their heads and their breasts. Oh, my God, how can the earth support such servants of Hell? An even more astounding thing to understand is how their mothers endure them in a state unworthy of a Christian! If I were not afraid of going too far, I would tell those mothers that they are worth no more than their daughters.

Alas! This sinful heart and those impure eyes are but sources of poison which bring death to anyone who looks at or listens to them. How do such monsters of iniquity dare to present themselves before a God Who is so holy and so set against impurity! Alas! Their poor lives are nothing but an accumulation of fuel which they amass to increase the flames of Hell through all eternity. But, my dear brethren, let us leave a subject which is so disgusting and so revolting to a Christian, whose purity should imitate that of Jesus Christ Himself, and let us return to our beautiful virtue, which raises us to Heaven, which opens to us the adorable Heart of our Lord and draws down upon us all sorts of spiritual and temporal blessings....

St. James tells us that this virtue comes from Heaven and that we shall never have it unless we ask it of God. We should, therefore, frequently ask God to give us purity in our eyes, in our speech, and in all our actions.... Finally, we should have a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin if we wish to preserve this lovely virtue; that is very evident, since she is the queen, the model, and the patron of virgins....

### **THE SERVICE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN**

If I wanted to, I would show you that in all walks of life there have been great servants of the Blessed Virgin. I would find for you, among them, those who begged their bread from door to door. I would find for you, among them, those who lived in much the same sort of state in life as many of you. I would find them for you among the wealthy, and in great number, too. We read in the Gospel that our Lord always treated people with great tenderness, except for one type of people whom He treated with severity; these were the Pharisees, and they were so treated because they

were proud and hardened in sin. They would willingly have hindered, if they could, the accomplishment of the will of the Father. What is more, our Lord called them “whited sepulchers, hypocrites, brood of vipers, offspring of vipers, who devour the breasts of their mothers.” We can say the same thing on the subject of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. All Christians have a great devotion to Mary except those old and hardened sinners who, for a very long time, having lost the faith, wallow in the slime of their brute passions.

The Devil tries to keep them in this state of blindness until that moment when death opens their eyes. Ah! If they had but the happiness to have recourse to Mary they would not fall into Hell, as will happen to them! No, my dear children, let us not imitate such people! On the contrary, let us follow the footsteps of all those true servants of Mary. Belonging to this number were St. Charles Borromeo, who always said his rosary on his knees. What is more, he fasted on all vigils of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin. He was so careful about saluting her on the stroke of the bell that when the Angelus rang, wherever he was, he went down on his knees, sometimes even in the middle of the road when it was full of mud. He desired that his whole diocese should have a great devotion to Mary and that her name would be uttered everywhere with the utmost respect. He had a number of chapels built in her honour. Now then, my dear brethren, why should not we imitate these great saints who obtained so many graces from Mary to preserve them from sin? Have we not the same enemies to fight, the same Heaven to hope for? Yes, Mary always has her eyes upon us. Do we suffer temptations? Let us turn our hearts towards Mary and we shall be delivered.

### **OUR INCONSISTENCY**

Let us leave, for the moment, that exterior worship which, by a special peculiarity and by an inconsistency full of irreligion, publicly displays your faith and at the same time gives it the lie.

Where is there to be found among you that fraternal charity which, in the principles of your belief, is founded on the most sublime and divine motives? Examine this a little more closely and you will see whether such reproaches are well founded.

Your religion is a beautiful one, the Jews and even the pagans tell us, if you do what you are commanded! Not only are you all brothers, but something even more wonderful: all together, you form the same Body of Jesus Christ, whose Flesh and Blood serve you every day as nourishment; you are all members, one of another. It must be admitted that that article of your faith is admirable indeed; it has something divine about it. If you were to act in accordance with your creed, you would be in a position to draw all other peoples to your religion—it is so beautiful, so consoling, and has the promise of such happiness in the life to come. But what makes all the peoples believe that your religion is not what you say it is, is that your conduct is quite the opposite to what your religion commands you.

If anyone were to question your pastors and if it were lawful for them to reveal the secrets of the confessional, they would be able to show that it is the quarrels, the enmities, the spirit of revenge, the jealousies, the scandals, the false rumours and gossip, the lawsuits, and so many other vices which horrify all those peoples whose religion you say is so far removed from yours in holiness. The corruption of morals, which is rife amongst you, keeps back those who are not of your religion from embracing it because if you were really convinced that it is good and divine, you would surely behave in a different way.

### **LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR**

All of our religion is but a false religion and all our virtues are mere illusions and we ourselves are only hypocrites in the sight of God if we have not that universal charity for everyone, for the good and for the bad, for the poor people as well as for the rich, for all those who do us harm as much as for those who do us good.

No, my dear brethren, there is no virtue which will let us know better whether we are the children or God than charity.

The obligation we have to love our neighbour is so important that Jesus Christ put it into a Commandment which He placed immediately after that by which He commands us to love Him with all our hearts. He tells us that all the law and the prophets are included in this commandment to love our neighbour. Yes, my dear brethren, we must regard this obligation as the most universal, the most necessary and the most essential to religion and to our salvation. In fulfilling this Commandment, we are fulfilling all others. St. Paul tells us that the other Commandments forbid us to

commit adultery, robbery, injuries, false testimonies. If we love our neighbour, we shall not do any of these things because the love we have for our neighbour would not allow us to do him any harm.

### **WHO HAS CHARITY?**

Ah, dear lord, how Christians are damned through lack of charity! No, no, my dear brethren, even if you could perform miracles, you will never be saved if you have not charity. Not to have charity is not to know your religion; it is to have a religion of whim, mood, and inclination. Carry on, carry on, you are only hypocrites and outcasts! Without charity you will never see God, you will never go to Heaven! ....

Give away your wealth, give generous alms to those who love you or who please you, go to Mass every day, go to Holy Communion every day if you wish: you are only hypocrites and outcasts. Continue on your way and you will shortly be in Hell! .... You cannot endure the faults of your neighbour because he is too tiresome; you do not like his company. Go away, unhappy people, you are but hypocrites, you have only a false religion, which, whatever good you are doing, will lead you to Hell. Oh my God! How rare this virtue is! Alas! It is so rare that they are rare, too, who will be going to Heaven! I don't want even to see them, you will say. At the church they distract me with all their mannerisms. Ah, unhappy sinner, say rather that you have no charity and that you are but a miserable creature who loves only those who agree with your sentiments and enter into your interests, who never go against you in anything, who flatter you on the subject of your good works, who love to thank you for your kindnesses, and who give you plenty of attention and recognition.

You will do everything for such as these; you do not even mind depriving yourself of some necessity to help them. But if they treated you with contempt or returned your kindness with ingratitude, you would no longer love them. You would never wish to lay eyes upon them. You would avoid their company. You would be very happy to cut short any dealings you have with them. Ah, dear God, what false devotions these are which can only lead us to a place among the outcasts.

If you have any doubt of this, my dear brethren, listen to St. Paul, who will not lead you astray. If, he tells us, I should give my wealth to the poor, if I should work miracles by raising the dead to life, and have not charity, I am nothing other than a hypocrite.

But to convince you even more firmly of it, go over the whole of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consult all the lives of the saints; you will find nothing in them which does not conform with this virtue. No, you will not find one of them who did not choose to do good to someone who had done them harm. Look at St. Francis de Sales, who tells us that if he had only one good work to do, he would choose to do it for someone who had done him some wrong rather than for someone who had done him some good service. Alas, my dear brethren, the person who has no charity goes far afield for evil! If someone does him some harm, you see him examining all his actions then.

He judges them. He condemns them. He turns them all to evil and is always quite certain that he is right.

But, you will tell me, there are plenty of times when you see people doing wrong and you cannot think otherwise.

My good friend, because you have no charity, you think that they are doing wrong. If you had charity, you would think quite otherwise because you would always think that you could have been mistaken, as so often happens. And to convince you of this, here is an example which I beg of you never to efface from your minds, above all when you think that your neighbour is doing wrong. It is recounted in the history of the Fathers of the Desert that a hermit named Simeon had remained for many years in solitude when he got the idea of returning to the world. But he asked God that men should never know his intentions during his lifetime. God granted him this grace and he went into the world. He used to pretend to be a fool, and he delivered the possessed from the Devil and he cured the sick. He used to go into the houses of women of evil life and make them swear that they would love him alone, and then he would give them all the money he had. Everyone looked upon him just as a hermit who had become eccentric. They saw him every day, this old man of more than seventy years of age, playing with the children in the streets. At other times he plunged himself into the midst of the public dances, moving around with the crowd while he spoke to them and telling them clearly what wrong they were really doing. But they only looked upon what he said as coming from a fool and simply despised him. At other times he climbed onto the stage and threw stones at all those who were down below. When he saw people who were possessed of the devil he fell in with them and imitated the possessed as if he also

were one of them. He was to be seen hurrying into the inns and mixing with the drunkards. In the markets he rolled around on the ground and did a thousand other things which were very extravagant and extraordinary. Everyone condemned and scorned him. Some looked upon him as a fool. Others thought him a libertine and a bad character who deserved only to be locked up. And yet, my dear children, despite all this, he was actually a saint who sought only scorn to win souls to God, even though everyone judged him to be bad. This shows us that although the very actions of our neighbour appear bad to us, we must not, ourselves, judge them to be bad. Often we judge things to be bad while in the sight of God they are not so....

Yes, my dear children, anyone who has charity does not see the faults of his neighbour....

Whoever possesses charity is sure that Heaven is for him! ....

That is the happiness which I desire for you.

### **PRAYING, FASTING, AND PLEASING OURSELVES**

My dear brethren, we read in holy Scripture that the Lord, while speaking to His people of the necessity to do good works in order to please Him and to become included in the number of saints, said to them: "The things that I ask are not above your powers; to do them it is not necessary for you to lift yourselves to the clouds nor to cross the seas. All that I command is, so to speak, in your hands, in your hearts, and all around."

I can easily repeat the very same thing to you, my dear brethren. It is true that we shall never have the happiness of going to Heaven unless we do good works, but let us not be afraid of that, my dear children. What Jesus Christ demands of us are not the extraordinary things or those beyond our powers. He does not require that we should be all day in the church or that we should do enormous penances, that is to say, to the extent of ruining our health, or even to that of giving all our substance to the poor (although it is very true that we are obliged to give as much as we possibly can to the poor, which we should do both to please God, Who commands it, and also to atone for our sins). It is also true that we should practice mortification in many things to make reparation for our sins. There is no doubt but that the person who lives without mortifying himself is someone who will never succeed in saving his soul. There is no doubt but that, although we cannot be all day in the church, which yet should be a great joy for us, we do know very well that we should never omit our prayers, at least in the morning and at night.

But, you will say, there are plenty who cannot fast, others who are not able to give alms, and others who have so much to do that often they have great difficulty in saying their prayers in the morning and at night. How can they possibly be saved, then, if it is necessary to pray continuously and to do good works in order to obtain Heaven?

Because all your good works, my dear brethren, amount to prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds, which we can easily perform as you shall see. Yes, my dear brethren, even though we may have poor health or even be infirm, there is a fast which we can easily perform.

Let us even be quite poor; we can still give alms. And however heavy or demanding our work, we can still pray to Almighty God without interfering with our labours; we can pray night and morning, and even all day long, and here is how we can do it. All the time that we deprive ourselves of anything which it gives us pleasure to do, we are practicing a fast which is very pleasing to God because fasting does not consist solely of privations in eating and drinking, but of denying ourselves that which pleases our taste most. Some mortify themselves in the way they dress; others in the visits they want to make to friends whom they like to see; others in the conversations and discussions which they enjoy. This constitutes a very excellent fast and one which pleases God because it fights self-love and pride and one's reluctance to do things one does not enjoy or to be with people whose characters and ways of behaving are contrary to one's own. You can, without offending God, go into that particular company, but you can deprive yourself of it to please God: there is a type of fasting which is very meritorious.

You are in some situation in which you can indulge your appetite? Instead of doing so, you take, without making it obvious, something which appeals to you the least. When you are buying chattels or clothes, you do not choose that which merely appeals to you; there again is a fast whose reward waits for you at the door of Heaven to help you to enter. Yes, my dear brethren, if we want to go about it properly, not only can we find opportunities of practicing fasting every day, but at every moment of the day.

Tell me, now, is there any fasting which would be more pleasing to God than to do and to endure with patience

certain things which often are very disagreeable to you? Without mentioning illness, infirmities, or so many other afflictions which are inseparable from our wretched life, how often do we not have the opportunity to mortify ourselves in putting up with what annoys and revolts us? Sometimes it is work which wearies us greatly; sometimes it is some person who annoys us. At another time it may be some humiliation which is very difficult to endure. Well, then, my children, if we put up with all that for God and solely to please Him, these are the fasts which are most agreeable to God and most meritorious in His eyes. You are compelled to work all the year round at very heavy and exacting labor which often seems as if it is going to kill you and which does not give you even the time to draw your breath. Oh, my dear children, what treasures would you be storing up for Heaven, if you so desired, by doing just what you do and in the midst of your labours having the wisdom and the foresight to lift up your hearts to God and say to Him: "My good Jesus, I unite my labours to Your labours, my sufferings to Your sufferings; give me the grace to be always content in the state in which You have placed me! I will bless Your holy Name in all that happens to me!" Yes, my dear children, if you had the great happiness to behave in this way, all your trials, all your labours, would become like most precious fruits which you would offer to God at the hour of your death. That, my children, is how everyone in his own state in life can practice a kind of fasting which is very meritorious and which will be of the greatest value to him for eternal life.

I have been telling you, too, that there is a certain type of almsgiving which everyone can perform. You see quite well that almsgiving does not consist solely in feeding those who are hungry and giving clothes to those who have none. It consists in all the services which one renders to a neighbour, whether of body or soul, when they are done in a spirit of charity. When we have only a little, very well, let us give a little; and when we have nothing, let us lend if we can. If you cannot supply those who are sick with whatever would be good for them, well then, you can visit them, you can say consoling words to them, you can pray for them so that they will put their illness to good use. Yes, my dear children, everything is good and precious in God's sight when we act from the motives of religion and of charity because Jesus Christ tells us that a glass of water would not go unrewarded. You see, therefore, my children, that although we may be quite poor, we can still easily give alms. I told you that however exacting our work was, there is a certain kind of prayer which we can make continually without, at the same time, upsetting our labours, and this is how it is done.

It is seeking, in everything we do, to do the will of God only. Tell me, my children, is it so difficult to seek only to do the will of God in all of our actions, however small they may be? Yes, my children, with that prayer everything becomes meritorious for Heaven, and without that will, all is lost. Alas! How many good things, which would help us so well to gain Heaven, go unrewarded simply by not doing our ordinary duties with the right intention!

### **DO YOU WANT TO BE HAPPY?**

Why, my dear brethren, are our lives full of so many miseries? If we consider the life of man carefully, it is nothing other than a succession of evils: the illnesses, the disappointments, the persecutions, and indeed the losses of goods fall unceasingly upon us so that whatever side the worldly man turns to or examines, he finds only crosses and afflictions. Go and ask anyone, from the humblest to the greatest, and they will all tell you the same thing. Indeed, my dear brethren, man on earth, unless he turns to the side of God, cannot be other than unhappy. Do you know why, my friends? No, you tell me. Well, here is the real reason.

It is that God, having put us into this world as into a place of exile and of banishment, wishes to force us, by so many evils, not to attach our hearts to it but to aspire to greater, purer, and more lasting joys than those we can find in this life. To make us appreciate more keenly the necessity to turn our eyes to eternal blessings, God has filled our hearts with desires so vast and so magnificent that nothing in creation is capable of satisfying them. Thus it is that in the hope of finding some pleasure, we attach ourselves to created objects and that we have no sooner possessed and sampled that which we have so ardently desired than we turn to something else, hoping to find what we wanted. We are, then, through our own experience, constrained to admit that it is but useless for us to want to derive our happiness here below from transient things. If we hope to have any consolation in this world, it will only be by despising the things which are passing and which have no lasting value and in striving towards the noble and happy end for which God has created us. Do you want to be happy, my friends? Fix your eyes on Heaven; it is there that your hearts will



find that which will satisfy them completely.

All the evils which you experience are the real means of leading you there. That is what I am going to show you, in as clear and brilliant way as shines the noon-day sun. First of all, I am going to tell you that Jesus Christ, by His sufferings and His death, has made all our actions meritorious, so that for the good Christian there is no motion of our hearts or of our bodies which will not be rewarded if we perform them for Him.

Perhaps you are already thinking: "That is not so very clear."

Very well! If that will not do you, let us put it more simply. Follow me for a moment and you will know the way in which to make all your actions meritorious for eternal life without changing anything in your way of behaving. All you have to do is to have in view the object of pleasing God in everything you do, and I will add that instead of making your actions more difficult by doing them for God, you will make them, on the contrary, much more pleasant and less arduous. In the morning, when you awake, think at once of God and quickly make the Sign of the Cross, saying to Him: "My God, I give you my heart, and since You are so good as to give me another day, give me the grace that everything I do will be for Your honour and for the salvation of my soul."

### **THE GIFT OF EVERY DAY**

Before beginning your work, my dear brethren, never fail to make the Sign of the Cross. Do not imitate those people without religion who dare not do this because they are in company. Offer quite simply all your difficulties to God and renew from time to time this offering, for by that means you will have the happiness of drawing down the blessing of Heaven on yourself and on all you do. Just think, my dear brethren, how many acts of virtue you can practice by behaving in this way, without making any change in what you are actually doing. If you work with the object of pleasing God and obeying His Commandments, which order you to earn your bread by the sweat of your brow, that is an act of obedience. If you want to expiate your sins, you are making an act of penance. If you want to obtain some grace for yourself or for others, it is an act of hope and of charity. Oh, how we could merit Heaven every day, my dear brethren, by doing just our ordinary duties, but by doing them for God and the salvation of our souls! Who stops you, when you hear the chimes striking, from thinking on the shortness of time and of saying in your minds: "Time passes and death comes closer."

I am hastening towards eternity. Am I really ready to appear before the tribunal of God? Am I not in a state of sin?"

### **THE PUBLIC CROSSES**

I am going to talk to you now about the public crosses, and I am going to give you the reason for their number, for the blessings which flow from them, and for the great honour which the Church pays them. If our interior crosses are so numerous and if the public crosses, these images of that Cross on which our God died, are also so numerous, it is that we may have always present in our thoughts the reminder that we are the children of a crucified God. We need not be surprised, my dear brethren, at the honour which the Church pays to this holy wood, which obtains for us so many graces and so many benefits. We see that the Church makes the Sign of the Cross in all her ceremonies, in the administration of all the Sacraments. Why is that? My friends, this is why. It is because all our prayers and all the Sacraments draw from the Cross their power and their virtue. During the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is the greatest, the most solemn and the most sublime of all those actions which can glorify God, the priest makes the Sign of the Cross over and over again. God desires that we may never lose the memory of it as the surest means of our salvation and the most formidable instrument for repelling the Devil. He has created us in the form of a cross so that every man might be the image of this cross upon which Jesus Christ died to save us. See how eager the Church is to increase their number? She urges them as a special embellishment on our churches and on all altars; she places them in the most public places.

### **THE CROSSES WHICH ARE WORN**

Why are crosses placed near towns and villages? It is to show the public profession which the Christian should make of the religion of Jesus Christ and to remind all passers-by that they should never forget the memory of the

Passion and death of our Saviour. This sign of redemption distinguishes us from idolaters, as in olden times circumcision distinguished the Jewish people from the infidels. Let us note, too, that when people want to destroy religion, they begin by overturning these monuments.

The first Christians considered that their greatest happiness was to wear upon themselves this salutary sign of our Redemption. In other times, the women and girls wore a cross which they made their most precious ornament; they hung it around their necks, showing thereby that they were the servants of a crucified God. But progressively, as the Faith diminished and as religion became weakened, this sacred sign has become rare or, to be more precise, has practically disappeared. Notice how the Devil works gradually towards evil. In this matter it began by the cutting out of the image of the Crucified and of the Blessed Virgin, and by the wearers' being satisfied with a cross which had been converted into ornamental forms. After that the Devil pushed the matter further: to replace this sacred sign, a chain was chosen, which was nothing more nor less than an ornament of vanity and which, very far from drawing down blessings from Heaven upon the wearers, involved them only in the ways and the traps of the Devil. Look at the difference between a chain and a cross. By the Cross, we have become children of freedom; by the Cross, Jesus has delivered us from the tyranny of the Devil into which sin had led us. The chain, on the contrary, is a sign of slavery; in other words, by means of this token of vanity, we leave God and give ourselves over to the Devil. Lord! How the world has changed since the time of the first Christians.

Ah, how large is the number of those who are no longer Christians except in name and whose conduct resembles that of the pagans! Ah, you will say to me, that is a bit strong now! We are not sorry that we are Christians; on the contrary. Tell us what you mean by saying that we have no more than the name of Christians. Well, my friends, that is very easy. It is because you are afraid to perform your acts of religion in front of other people and that, when you are in a house, you do not dare to make the Sign of the Cross before eating, or else that, in order to make it, you will turn away so that you will not be noticed and laughed at. It is because, when you hear the Angelus ringing, you pretend not to have heard it and you do not say it for fear of someone making fun of you; or again, it is when God puts into your mind the thought of going to Confession and you say: "Oh, I am not going. They would be laughing at me." If you behave in this manner, you cannot say that you are Christians. No, my friends, you are, like those Jews of long ago, rejected or, rather, you have separated yourselves. You are nothing but apostates. Your language proves it, and your way of living manifests it equally clearly. Why, my dear brethren, was the name of apostate given to the Emperor Julian? It was given to him, you will tell me, because he was a Christian to begin with but later he lived as the pagans do.

Well, then, my good friends, what difference is there between your conduct and that of the pagans? Do you know what the ordinary vices of the pagans are? Some, corrupted by the hideous vice of impurity, spew from their mouths all sorts of abominations; others, given over to gluttony, seek only tasty food or to fill themselves with wine. The sole preoccupation of their young girls is with clothes and the desire to look attractive to others. What do you think of conduct like that, my dear brethren?

That is the conduct of people who entertain no hope of any other life.

You are quite right. And what difference is there between your life and theirs? If you want to speak frankly, you will admit that there is none and that as a consequence, you are Christians in name only.

Oh, my God! that You have so few Christians to imitate You! Alas! If there are so few of them to wear their cross there will be only few, too, to bless You for all eternity.

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