

FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

BY

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Hora est jam nos de somno surgere.

It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep.

(Rom. 13, 11.)



TODAY, my beloved children, we are celebrating the first fruits of the coming of our Lord. For the Church, there is no more desirable period than this one. It is the time when she gives us the most magnificent pages to read, when she sings her most beautiful hymns. Just as spring is of all seasons of the year the gladdest and sweetest, so of all solemnities the most touching and the holiest is this time of Advent. This is the time for which the patriarchs of the Old Testament sighed with such ardent longing, as did all the holy souls who succeeded them for nearly five thousand years. They cried out for it with all their hearts: 'Lord, oh, that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down.' (Is. 64, 1.) 'To enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.' (Luke 1, 79.) All the happenings, all the types of the Old Testament had no other object but to proclaim the greatness and excellence of the one that they were always desiring and whose coming we are now about to greet.

At this moment, then, my dearly beloved, let us offer this infinitely wise God endless thanksgiving. Let us praise and bless him to our utmost that he has created us in the time of grace, that he has placed at our disposal (if only we will profit by them) all his riches and all his gifts.

This is why the apostle bids us rise from the sleep of sin: 'The night is past and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.' For this reason we must carefully study the cause of our falls and see how we can overcome our faults and all our sinfulness so as to recover our first innocence.

The motive that urged God, the author of all things, to create the human race was doubtless to fill the places left empty by Lucifer and his accomplices when they were driven out of heaven. (Isaias 14.) But this same Lucifer, in his jealousy and implacable hatred dragged man into disobedience (Gen. 3), and man by letting himself be seduced, lost at one blow all the graces and virtues by which he would have been raised up in the likeness of God; he soiled his spotless human nature with hideous impurity; he inflicted upon himself mortal wounds, such as blindness of spirit, a dis-

ordered will, corrupt concupiscence, weakness of his irascible inclinations, according to the saying of the royal prophet so soundly true, 'Man when he was in honour did not understand; he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them.' (Ps. 48.)

Henceforward three enemies rose up against us and these enemies, alas, are triumphing everywhere on the whole surface of the earth: they hold under their sway and their tyranny the hearts of the poor mortals that they possess and occupy. These enemies are: the World, the Flesh and the Devil. And as long as their will masters a man, that soul is lost, that soul chosen by God, loved by God with so much care and tenderness. Indeed, whoever becomes their victim is doomed to the misery of eternal death, unless at least he repents.

Now in these days, how large a place do these three enemies occupy in the hearts of religious as well as in those of the laity! How powerful is their ascendancy is plain to all; this is what is so bitterly deplored by the friends of God who constantly think of him and love him.

The eternal loss of souls gives them such pain that their hearts are broken with the anguish of seeing the terrifying excesses to which self-love can lead. There is hardly any one any longer who thinks of God, his Creator, and who is willing to give him pure and sincere love.

First, look at the world. It rules by pride, pride that is hidden within and pride that is conspicuous exteriorly. Who can number those who range themselves under this banner of Satan? On the contrary, how rare and easy to count are the exceptions. And who shall number the sins of that multitude? When Satan has completely mastered the soul he drives it to mockery, to anger, to unjust suspicions, rash judgments, unbridled desire of revenge, aversions and discord. And so all the followers of Satan aim at discord. And so all the followers of Satan aim at division; they are devoid of love; they show themselves pitiless towards others, judging them inconsiderately and without mercy.

Then the flesh! What it seeks eagerly are animal pleasures, conveniences, comforts, sensual delights, success in everything. The unhappiness that results to these poor mortals from this sad domination no one can understand: still less have those who are seized and blinded by all these evils any notion of it. They cast themselves into hell. And so following the abominable seduction of these three mortal enemies, almost the whole human race is plunged into eternal damnation.

Do you desire to return to your primitive dignity, to the original honour that our first father lost for us at the beginning and that we

have since lost for ourselves by sin; do you desire to prepare an entrance for Our Lord into your soul? then flee into the world, declare war against Satan, bring your flesh into servitude, but with prudence; finally put into practice the six principles that I am about to describe to you.

(i) First of all what caused the ruin of Adam and Eve in the earthly paradise was pride and pleasure. So we must do two things to restore nature's former strength. The first is to resist energetically all inordinate pleasures and die to self-indulgence, but always without exaggeration.

The second is to destroy by a deep humility before God and our fellow men the self-glorification produced in our nature by pride. There is a popular old proverb which says: 'If you wish to reach the front row, take the back one'. By these two things we shall restore the native energy of our human nature.

(ii) Then we are to imitate the angels in two ways. Firstly by forgiving from the depths of our hearts all who have treated us ill and by loving our enemies with sincere affection as if they were our friends. Do not the holy angels continue to shower upon us the benefits of their love in spite of the way we offend them? Secondly by coming to the help of anyone who needs it. Are not the heavenly spirits always at our service for the love of God?

(iii) Finally we must become like God and that in two ways. Firstly by imitating the true obedience of our Lord's constant submission to his eternal Father until death. Secondly by forcing ourselves to grow more obedient every day and to persevere as long as we are in this world in that obedience and in all the virtues of which Christ has left us an example in his most holy life and in his Passion. In that way our souls will become purified and heavenly and we shall be made one and the same spirit with God, in a deep humility, in patience that is full of sweetness, in complete interior poverty, in a love that is on fire with God! All those who study these virtues (alas, how few they are) will find that they overcome their enemies; divine mercy lightens the heavy load of their afflictions; God himself unites with them to carry their cross.

(iv) Indeed God permits that all his elect should be subjected to a multiplicity of trials. His principal motive is that they should obtain by suffering the four following blessings: Firstly, he means to draw them back into themselves and make them understand that troubles only come to attract them to an interior life and to maintain them in it.

Secondly, he wants to show them where these trials should lead them, that is, to their spiritual improvement and to a total abandonment, entire submission to the divine will.

Thirdly, his object is to detach them completely from creatures and from themselves so that they will be at the mercy of God's guidance.

Fourthly, he desires to train them in patience by all kinds of sacrifices. Now what is patience under adversity? Does it consist in undisturbedness in the midst of sufferings? Certainly not; but it is the deep and inmost conviction of soul which causes them to believe in all sincerity that whatever they are called upon to suffer is no injustice; that they are only undergoing what they deserve; that they merit far greater sufferings and that they should be sincerely grateful to the author of their trouble.

(v) When they have reached this stage they can hear profitably the words of Christ and follow him humbly. Christ himself becomes their leader, he is their master. 'If you continue in my Word, you shall be my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth: And the truth shall make you free.' (John 8, 32.)

There are two kinds of people who hear the Word of Christ.

Some hear it with joy: wherever it is spoken there they run eagerly: this Word strikes upon their ears and their intelligence receives it as it stands through their senses by a purely natural light. From this it follows that whatever does not flatter their taste disgusts them. Urged on by curiosity and no other motive but a natural one, they discuss this or that thing always on the lookout for novelties on which to feed their minds. They do not perceive that to make progress in virtue, they must break away from reasoning and take a path diametrically opposed to it if they want to become perfect.

Others on the contrary recollect themselves; they shut themselves up in their inmost being and there they study in all simplicity divine inspirations with an enlightened mind; they give minute attention to their vocation, to the end that God proposes for them and towards which he is attracting them. All this they receive directly from God without intermediary. For all that comes through an intermediary, through men, is subject to error: that is the way to become overrun with multiplicities. The allurements of creatures always contains some element of bitterness; we nearly always experience from them something disagreeable, so much so that we must cast them off totally to be able to penetrate to the very depths of our soul if we really desire to taste the sweet things of the spirit.

All who discern within themselves God's gifts and inspirations, whether these gifts reach them directly or through some intermediary, draw everything from this depth of the soul and refer it all to the whole source: the divine goodness. These indeed go to quench their thirst and find their delight in the true source. Whilst the

first, those we mentioned above, are infected with the leprosy of self-seeking and self-will. Also, in all their designs, in all their evercises, in everything, they seek nothing but their own advantage.

(vi) Perhaps someone will ask how one can feel the divine influence apart from all obstacles. Certainly one can by remaining recollected in the depths of one's own being, by dwelling within oneself. Consequently let each one be his own guest, let him avoid all vain outlets, the seeking of external things. Indeed whoever remains within himself, opportunely, will certainly be aware of all that happens within him, all that God brings to pass in him, within, directly, without intermediary and all that he arranges for him exteriorly as so many means to his end. Then let him be resigned, let him follow God wherever it shall please him to lead him, be it to contemplation or to active work or to sheer spiritual enjoyment.

Yes, I repeat, let him follow God promptly in everything, whether he brings him sorrow or reserves for him consolation. And if nothing of that kind comes to him from God let him never cease to be resigned to the empty void within his soul, let him willingly do without it all for the love of God, and recollecting himself interiorly in time of trouble, let him take as his model the beloved figure of our Saviour. Our Lord indeed accomplished all his acts for three reasons.

The first was the glory of his heavenly Father that he willed to obtain above everything. Never did he seek his own glory either in great things or in small; but he accepted all gladly to refer it to his Father.

The second was the salvation and happiness of the human race that he desired with all his heart and eagerly sought, wanting all to be saved, that all should know his holy name, according to the express evidence of the apostle: 'Who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.' (I Tim. 2, 4.)

The third motive was to leave for us in all his words, in all his deeds, in his whole life a true exemplar and finished picture of the perfect life in its highest form. Also all those who are determined to follow Christ are the most lovable and most perfect of men. In this way they are regenerated; they become the Church's most precious treasure; they always seek to do whatever they believe to be most perfect without bothering whether the work given them be great or small, important or of less account, they are content to know that it is pleasing to God. And so all their actions become priceless. From the moment that the divine will has become as agreeable and dear to them everywhere, it no longer matters to them whether they are placed in the front rank or the last.

May Almighty God grant that we ourselves shall one day become souls of such worth. Amen.