

THE ORDER OF PENANCE AND OF JOY

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III. THE TERTIARY A VOTARY OF JOY

"The voice of rejoicing and of salvation is in the tabernacles of the just." (Ps. CXVII, 15.)

POPE Pius X, when still Cardinal Patriarch of Venice, once made the following remarkable statement: "In the Third Order we have a powerful means of saving society. Because the Third Order can instil again into society the spirit of obedience and Christianity, the spirit of discipline and submission, the spirit of peace and happiness." In the Third Order, therefore, did this great Tertiary Pope perceive the power and at the same time the means of procuring and fostering peace and joy in the hearts of men.

Every human being longs for joy as something necessary for its very existence. This desire of our heart is inborn, and although it can be entirely satisfied only in the next world, yet even in this world of sorrow and trial it is not doomed to utter disappointment. For whithersoever we turn, we perceive some sort of joy, since nature, to use the words of Bishop Keppler, is as lavish in creating joys, as she is in budding forth the countless flowers. Indeed, there are joys in nature, joys in the family, joys in society. And what shall we say of the endless joys to be had in the vast family of Jesus Christ, in the Church, with all her joyous feasts and celebrations? Verily, there is no dearth of joys in this world, but there is a sad lack of persons desirous of procuring these joys.

Happily, we can assert that the Third Order is capable of furnishing such persons as are filled with this true joy, as it also combines in itself the means of obtaining it. To understand this, let us consider the Rule of the Third Order in a new

light, that is, from the standpoint of joy.

There is no reward without previous exertion. Thus it is also with joy. If we wish to reap joy, we must earn it. What then must Tertiaries do to obtain the true joy and peace of heart that their holy Order has in store for them? In the first place and above all, they must perform their duties and fulfill their pledges made to God. In the Rule we read: "All who enter the Third Order, whether men or women, shall make a year's novitiate: then, making the profession prescribed by the Rule of the Order, they shall promise to observe the law of God, to obey the Church, and, if they fail in their profession, to make the required satisfaction." (Chap. i, 4.) This is the first means offered them by the Rule to obtain joy. True joy, as we have seen in a former treatise, can come only from heaven, and springs from the union with God, the source of all good.

The Tertiary, therefore, who strives to fulfill this his promise made to God, who keeps the commandments of God and of the Church, who nobly performs the duties of his state of life, will also partake of this true joy. It will no doubt cost you considerable trouble and pains, dear Tertiaries, to remove from your hearts all that is displeasing to God; but, for this trouble you will be abundantly rewarded with the spirit of peace and constant joy. "Keep a good conscience and then thou shalt always have joy;" and again, "If there be joy in the world, certainly the man whose heart is pure possesses it." These two sayings of the Ven. Thomas à Kempis, teach us that we can have true joy only when our heart is free from sin, when we ob-

serve the commandments and perform our duties to the best of our ability.

When the sky is clear, the sun can shine directly on the earth and refresh us with his warmth and beauty. When our soul is pure and free from sin, the rays of divine grace can also enlighten and fill us with the brightness and cheer of heaven. Great was the joy of David when he was informed that the king was pleased with him. (I Kings xxviii, 5.) But greater still is the joy of the soul that serves God, the King of kings, faithfully, because it can rest assured that it is pleasing to him. "The voice of rejoicing and of salvation is in the tabernacles of the just." (Ps. cxvii, 15)

"Everywhere and always," writes Father A. M. Weis, O. P., "has it been observed that exactness and earnestness in the service of God are rewarded with serenity of soul and happiness." And Bishop Kepler asserts, "For those who live up to their belief, the bounds of enjoyment are set by duty, by obedience to the commandments, by the rules of physical and spiritual health, by the love of God and one's neighbor. Within these bounds all legitimate sources of joy flow in fuller and purer streams than in the world.—The Christian has the first claim on the rich harvest of joy gathered from the fields of the earth, even in this life, namely, the joys offered by nature, by the home, by society, by art, not excepting food and drink. The Christian has first claim to these things, because, as St. Paul says, 'for the faithful above all hath God created them.'"

Your obligation to keep the commandments, dear Tertiaries, is a double one; you are obliged thereto as Catholic Christians and as members of the Third Order. Be ever on your guard, therefore, to repel all who might attempt to rob you of your joy; remove everything that

is displeasing to God, and you will never be wanting in true happiness. It is true, the dangers are great and manifold, and the enemies who wish to rob you of your purity of soul, and thereby of your joy, are numerous and powerful. But do not let this discourage you. Even of the just man, we read in Holy Writ that he shall fall seven times, that is, often; but we also read that he shall not remain in his sin, but shall rise again. (Prov. xxiv, 16.) Sin is certainly a reason for sorrow and sadness; but the Saints consider it of such importance for us to be glad and even joyful, that they do not hesitate to say, even if one falls into sin, he should not lose courage and become downcast and dejected; one's sorrow must be tempered by the hope of forgiveness. St. Francis on a certain occasion rebuked one of his companions, who was downcast, and said to him, "If thou hast sinned, repent and confess, and ask God for forgiveness, and say with the Prophet, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit.'"

Try to serve God faithfully, and in this service place all your diligence. Should you, nevertheless, fall occasionally, then do not be discouraged, because, after all, we are men and not angels. God knows our weakness; he does not wish us to be sad, but with all the more courage to rise and ask him for more strength. "As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame (our nature); and he remembereth that we are dust." (Ps. cii, 13, 14.)

The Church, our ever provident Mother, furnishes us with sufficient means to rise again from our fall, to regain the purity and peace of heart we have lost by sin, and to begin anew the struggle against the enemies of our happiness. These means are the holy sacra-

ments; above all Confession and Holy Communion. "The sacraments are intimately related to joy. They restore it when absent; they ennoble and sanctify it, if it is merely natural. Confession is a relief for life's grief and weariness, a safety-valve for the terrible pressure of the sense of guilt. The Sacrament of the Altar opens up an infinite realm of mystical joys." (Bishop Keppler.)

But the Rule of the Third Order is not satisfied with the annual reception of the sacraments; it prescribes that the members receive at least once every month. (Chap. ii, 5.) In our own day, however, the Vicar of Christ has advised the faithful to receive Holy Communion frequently, even daily; and the Tertiaries, who should always take the lead, will surely not be the last to follow this admonition. Oh! if all men would understand how much peace and joy and grace they can obtain from these sacraments, they would frequently approach the tribunal of Penance, and still more frequently appear at the table of the Lord to receive there the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and with it ineffable joy and peace of soul.

"The vitality imparted to our bodily system by solid nourishment brings along with it a certain sense of comfort, which inclines us to joyfulness no less than to action. Similarly, in Holy Communion Jesus comes to put truth into our minds and order into our affections; he brings with him that peace and joy of which he is the source; he causes us to realize the truth of his words: 'My yoke is sweet and my burden is light.' The secret of the joy of the soul which Communion causes, is that it increases charity and moves us also to love God—

"Communion, therefore, is a source of joy. It dispels sadness and despondency, makes us experience su-

pernatural pleasures and inebriates the soul with the gentle sweetness of the divine goodness. It is not strength alone that it gives us, but heartiness as well. Taking the Eucharist into account, we can hardly wonder at the dauntless courage of the martyrs. They had taken care to fortify themselves with the Body of Christ. Need we marvel, either, at the delicate purity of so many virgins, who, during the period when the passions are most lively, and although beset with snares, keep both body and mind unsullied. It is in Communion that they conceive a distaste for sensual pleasures and are buoyed up with the joy of the Blessed." (Lintelo, S. J.)

The Rule commands the Tertiaries, moreover, to immediately make their peace with God, should they be at enmity with him. "Let them examine their conscience every night as to whether they have perchance done anything of the kind (i. e. used improper language or committed any other sin); if they have, let them do penance for the fault." Every evening, therefore, the Tertiaries should examine their conscience to learn whether during the day they have done aught that might disturb the purity of their soul, and diminish their peace and joy. If they find themselves guilty of anything they should at once repent of it, perform some little act of penance, and make the resolution to do better in the future. If they have sinned grievously, they should be determined to receive the sacrament of Penance as soon as possible.

Let Tertiaries, therefore, often think of the words their holy Father St. Francis once addressed to one of his companions, who was extremely downcast: "Why are you so sad? Have you offended God? If such is the case, then make peace with Him at once, and do not trouble others with your sadness."