HE WHO DOES NOT ADVANCE GOES BACKWARD

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Dear faithful, today we hear from the lips of Christ the Lord a kind of warning: "Unless your justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." This is a warning addressed to all of us, Catholics. A warning against something that poses a great danger and is very widespread, namely minimalism.

We have grown accustomed, my dear brethren, to leading our earthly lives at the minimum, so as not to exert ourselves too much, so as not to give too much of ourselves. And so it is on every level on which we move here on earth. On the spiritual level too. So often we give the Lord God miserable leftovers, scraps: scraps of our time, scraps of our interest. And Christ the Lord warns against this today.

As Catholics we cannot lead a life at the minimum level: as much as I must, that much I will do. Whoever lives in such a minimalist version, whoever does not give to God everything that he is and everything that he has, will not earn his entry into the kingdom of heaven. Saint Jerome writes in one of his commentaries on the Gospel that Christ does not command us what is impossible, but what is perfect. So often, my dear brethren, we look for excuses for ourselves: after all, I am not a priest, I am not a nun, after all I do not have to pray so much, after all I do not have to get so involved. A great, great danger, which has already cast more than one soul into hell.

For, my dear brethren, the ancient Romans already used to say: *Qui non progreditur, regreditur*. He who does not go forward goes back. And such is the reality of our human life. It is not enough, my dear brethren, to stand still, to imagine that everything in our life is somehow in order. We are called to go forward. Imagine a mountaineer who is climbing Mount Everest or some other eight-thousander, and who, after reaching, say, 1,000 metres, opens the champagne and celebrates: behold, he has already conquered the summit. A madman, a fool. But this is what our earthly life looks like, my dear brethren. We content ourselves with some level or other, and at that level of our spiritual, intellectual development we simply stop.

He who does not go forward goes back. We must not forget these words, which correspond to what even the pagans had already observed. Indeed, with regard to the spiritual life they apply with even greater force. He who, my dear brethren, does not go forward will begin to go back. He will begin to go back. That is why Saint Paul warns all Catholics: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall." He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall.

THE GREAT PATHOLOGY

Dear faithful, the terrifying, in its very essence, state of present-day civilisation, the spiritual and moral state of the people who live around us, is to a great extent the result of precisely such an approach to life. I will live at the minimum. I will not exert myself, I will not delve too deeply. How often do you hear from people with whom you try to talk about some deeper subject, to explain something to them: "No, no, no. I do not even want to hear it. What I know is enough for me. What I have is enough for me. No, no, no, do not explain anything to me." The reality that surrounds us, my dear brethren, is in part precisely the result of such an approach. People are not interested in truth, they are not interested in any kind of growth, they are not interested in climbing the mountain, they are not interested in—to refer to last Sunday's Gospel—launching out into the deep, but are content with the shallows, with shoddiness, with rubbish, and they have a whole host, a whole litany of excuses besides: because of this, because of that, to justify themselves.

And the result, my dear brethren, of such an approach, of living at the minimum, of living in the shallows, is the one great pathology that surrounds us, because nobody around us today truly carries out his

duties. They all couldn't care less. Doctors do not heal, teachers do not teach, policemen do not chase criminals, priests do not give worship to God by offering the Holy Mass. One great pathology, and yet everyone is content, everyone is convinced that everything in their life is in order. Everything is in order. And it is not. A deceptive feeling, my dear brethren, self-satisfaction.

The great queen Isabella, the Queen of Spain, once commissioned the painting of a picture that showed a priest at the altar offering Holy Mass, a woman giving birth to a child, and a criminal being hanged on the gallows. We would say: nothing special. But precisely, everything was in its place. Everything corresponded to God's order. That order of God, which since the time of Martin Luther at the very least, the arch-heretic in Europe, has been turned upside down. And hence the one great pathology, the one great shoddiness all around us. Priests who have abandoned God's altars, who have stepped up to a little table and become masters of ceremonies. Women who hate their own motherhood and demand the right to kill their own children. Criminals who, instead of hanging on gallows, laugh in the faces of their victims.

Dear faithful, we can no longer live in the conviction that it makes no difference what we do, no difference what we believe, God must save us anyway. It is not so at all. It is not a matter of indifference to God how we human beings live here on earth. And let the words of warning spoken by Saint Paul remain in our memory: "God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting. And in doing good let us not fail. For in due time we shall reap, not failing. Therefore, while we have time, let us do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Praised be Jesus Christ.