DO NOT DISREGARD GOD'S INSPIRATIONS

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Beloved in Christ the Lord, in today's Gospel we hear the account of the calling of Saint Matthew, Matthew Levi, who was a tax collector, and was therefore despised by the Jews, because tax collectors were engaged in collecting taxes for the Roman occupier. Among the Jews the term „tax collector" meant a sinful man, an unclean man, a traitor.

And today Christ the Lord comes to the tax office where Saint Matthew is carrying out his duties. He comes in order to call him with the words: „Follow Me." As Saint Matthew himself, the author of this Gospel, recorded: „And rising up, he followed Him."

Truly, my dear brethren, God is at work in our lives. God works through other people, through various events, through inspirations that come to us suddenly from who knows where, that can sit in our heads for a long time, that can torment a man. But it depends entirely and solely on us whether we follow such a heavenly inspiration or reject it.

SQUANDERED CHANCES

How many misfortunes in human life result from the fact that a man rejects divine inspirations? How many people, when they stand before the face of the divine Judge, who rewards the good and punishes the evil, will discover with horror: „God tried so many times to save me, so many times He gave me a chance, so many times He sent me an inspiration to go to holy confession, to change something in my life, to begin to pray, to begin to go to holy Mass." How many people, my dear brethren, will experience shock, how many people will feel hatred toward themselves in hell, because they wasted the chance, because they wasted their life, because „God spoke to me, and I stopped up my ears." One of the main causes, one of the sources of the torment of souls in hell will be that they will realize that with so little effort they could have saved themselves for all eternity, but they squandered those chances.

Dear faithful, we must make an examination of conscience every day: what is my attitude toward those divine inspirations that God gives me, toward this call „Follow Me." Not everyone is called to God's service. Not everyone is called to the priestly life, the religious life. But every man here on earth is called to follow the Lord Jesus, to imitate Him, to fulfil His will, to profess the Catholic faith. And this call „Follow Me" resounds in the ears of every man. Every man is called to seek the truth. And the Truth is, after all, God Himself.

When we look at our life, we realize how many such divine inspirations we have wasted. How many times God gave us a chance to change something in our life? How many times He called us to finally do something with our life, and we remained indifferent to that divine voice.

Saint Matthew did not remain indifferent when he saw the Saviour, when he heard His divine voice: rising up, he followed Him. He did not deliberate, he did not wonder whether it would pay off for him, he did not postpone, he did not say: „Lord Jesus, give me three more months, a year, I will finish my duties here, I will hand in my notice." Rising up, he followed Him.

A STORY FROM LIGUORI

Dear faithful, what a great danger for the soul it is to reject God's inspirations. What a great, mortal danger it is to put off amendment and conversion until later.

Saint Alphonsus Maria Liguori relates in one of his works a story that took place in the year of Our Lord 1604 in Belgium. Two young men, students, did not especially apply themselves to their studies, but devoted all their time to various kinds of amusements. One evening they went to a woman of loose morals. One of them, named Richard, left earlier and re-

turned to his lodgings. Wearied by the carousing, his eyelids were heavy as lead. He undressed and lay down to sleep, to rest. And then the thought flashed through his mind that today he had not yet said, as was his custom, a few Hail Marys in honour of the Immaculate Virgin, and he began to struggle with himself. On the one hand, that thought in his head, not to neglect that prayer, to fulfil what he was accustomed to say every day. And on the other hand, the weakness of the body, the drowsiness that seemed to be overcoming him already. And at that moment he sprang up and said those Hail Marys. Probably in a slipshod way, probably in haste, but he said them and went to sleep.

And suddenly in a dream his companion came to him in a terrifying form, stinking, as if burnt by fire, and he says to him: „Who are you? What is happening?" The companion answers: „I am John. After leaving that woman I died in the street and was damned. I am now in hell, and a similar fate awaits you." Terrified, Richard asks: „What saved me, then? Why did this fate befall you, and not me?" And he hears in reply: „Devotion to the Mother of God saved you. The same sentence was passed upon you, but the Most Holy Mother, out of regard for those prayers that you offered every day, obtained rescue for you, obtained for you one more chance, so that you would not now end up in hell."

At that moment Richard heard bells ringing in a nearby Franciscan church. He ran there and began to tell the whole story. And because he was known for how he lived, the friars did not especially believe him. They thought he was mocking, joking. But one of them went to the address that Richard had given and indeed saw in the street the rotting body of the young man, Richard's companion. Richard asked to be received into the ranks of the Franciscan friars. He became a priest, a missionary. He even went to Japan, to Asia. There, in Asia, he suffered martyrdom.

DEVOTION TO OUR LADY

Dear faithful, this story, which Saint Alphonsus Maria Liguori relates, which happened more than 400 years ago, remains, after all, extremely relevant. It is a warning to all of us not to neglect divine inspirations. What fate would have befallen that poor Richard if that evening, out of laziness, he had not said his prayer? He would have gone to hell for all eternity. God gave him one more chance. The Most Holy Mother obtained those chances for him. And for us too, my dear brethren, it is a lesson and a call. Let us not disregard divine inspirations. Let us not disregard in particular devotion to Our Lady.

For as the saints point out, the devil works in this way: when someone falls into sin, he does whatever he can to draw him away from devotion to Our Lady. For such a sinner, deprived of the support of the Mother of God, will sink into sin up to his ears and drown in it. So it is, my dear brethren: for a man who lives in sin, in grave sin, it is harder and harder to pray the Rosary. It is harder and harder to say even a single Hail Mary. The devil knows perfectly well that whomever he draws away from Our Lady, that one it will be easier for him to seize in his claws for all eternity.

And one hears, my dear brethren, and sees from pastoral practice: people who begin to have a problem with sin lose devotion to Our Lady, become indifferent, and even hostile, or become the sort of smart alecks, pseudo-theologians, who begin to explain to themselves that, after all, Our Lady is unnecessary for us, the Lord Jesus is enough. Why talk so much about Our Lady? My dear brethren, a mother is a mother. Where the father wants to punish, where he is already pulling out the belt to administer the deserved punishment to the child, there the mother still intercedes, still pleads that the punishment be put off, delayed, that one more chance be given. And it is just the same in the supernatural reality. It is just the same in the spiritual reality.

SAINT MATTHEW'S EXAMPLE

Dear faithful, may this feast of Saint Matthew, apostle, evangelist, who from a great sinner became a great saint, be for all of us an occasion to make a firm resolution that we will not pass by indifferently, that we will not disregard the heavenly inspirations that God sends us for our good, in order to save us, to help us. „I came not to call the just, but sinners," we hear from the Saviour. „They that are in health need not a

physician, but they that are ill."

Let us turn today to that divine Physician of souls and ask for help, for rescue for ourselves and for our nearest and dearest. Let us ask the Most Holy Mother for the gift of conversion, for the preservation of our souls, of our relatives, friends and enemies from the fire of hell. Let us ask that as many people as possible look today toward the divine Physician, who desires to heal us of the diseases of the soul, that as many souls as possible respond today to the call that the Lord Jesus addresses to us: „Follow Me." So, rising up, let us follow Him, as Saint Matthew did.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.