PERSEVERANCE IN GRACE UNTIL DEATH

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Beloved in Christ the Lord! On this Friday of the Ember Days of Lent, Holy Church wishes to call all of us to perseverance on God's path, on the path of justice. For what we often forget, sinking into complacency, into self-love, is that even the just man is not free from the attack of the evil spirit. Even the just man can go astray, can fall into satanic claws. Even the just man can reach a point, a dramatic point, at which he abandons the path of justice and chooses the path of iniquity. Hence we could say that the Catholic religion is a religion that always looks to the end, because whether we die in the state of sanctifying grace or in mortal sin will decide our eternity. Hence, too, on this Friday of the Ember Days of Lent we must pray fervently for perseverance in God's grace until the end, until death.

Dear faithful, the history of the Church unfortunately shows a whole mass of cases of people who began well and ended wretchedly. And so, my dear brethren, in the last several decades too we have observed a whole mass of such misfortunes, people who abandoned the path of justice and entered the path of iniquity.

Who is a just man? A just man is a man who gives to everyone what is due to him. A just man is therefore a man who first of all gives to God what is due to God. That is, bowing down, adoration. He is a man who asks God for forgiveness for his transgressions. A man who asks that the Lord God would bless him in his good intentions.

And so, my dear brethren, for 2,000 years the Catholic Church has spared no effort so that the ranks of the just might grow and the ranks of the wicked might shrink. And for centuries this mission of the Church bore great fruit. But for several decades now, since the time of the Council revolution, we have been observing, my dear brethren, exactly the opposite process: the ranks of the wicked are growing, and the ranks of the just are melting away like snow in the sun. For who today has that desire, that firm resolution, to give to everyone what is due to him, to give honour and glory to the Lord God first of all?

THE COUNCIL REVOLUTION

Dear faithful, we are, after all, perfectly aware of what happened after the Second Vatican Council. A whole mass of bishops, priests and faithful who had been raised and prepared to walk the path of justice simply abandoned that path of justice and entered the path of iniquity. The old religion, the religion of God, was rejected and replaced with a pseudo-religion of man, in which man is the most important, in which man is adored, man who becomes the measure of everything.

And, after all, my dear brethren, this revolution was carried out with the participation of men who had been raised in the old religion. The bishops who came to the Second Vatican Council, who then introduced the new order, were all clergy formed in traditional seminaries, who had received traditional priestly ordination, and so were prepared and called to walk the path of justice. This is what we hear today in the lesson of today's holy Mass, taken from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel. And those just men turned away from the path of justice and entered the path of iniquity, and on a massive scale. For the resistance against the Council revolution, against the implementation, the establishment of the new, false order, was minimal.

THE LE PUY PRIEST

In the year of the Lord 2016, while staying in France, I went to a jubilee in the town of Le Puy. It is a very old Marian shrine in which the so-called *Grand Pardon*, that is, the great forgiveness, is observed, a jubilee which in Le Puy is celebrated when Good Friday falls on the day of the Annunciation,

that is, on 25 March. This happens extremely rarely, once in 200 years or thereabouts. So in 2016 the last such jubilee was celebrated. The next one is somewhere around 2150. And in 2016 the jubilee is rather short, because according to tradition it lasts from Easter Sunday to Low Sunday.

I went to Le Puy with the faithful from France. The faithful came together from all over France, and we were lodged in the *Grand Séminaire*, the great seminary, the diocesan seminary of Le Puy. The building really does make a great impression, but, my dear brethren, it no longer fulfils its function. The name "great seminary" remains, but there are no seminarians, so the great seminary, with its great beautiful courtyard and great corridors, you can have a look on the internet, has been turned into a pilgrims' house. And the director of this pilgrims' house was an elderly French priest, certainly already over eighty, who, having found out, having seen at first glance priests and clerics in cassocks with sashes, well, already knew what he was dealing with, and started the conversation himself: "And will you be saying the Mass of Saint Pius V here?" — "Absolutely." — "Yes. I remember. I remember, because I was ordained in the 1940s. I said that Mass myself, and thank goodness the Vatican Council came and now we have the new *Ordo Missae*."

We have, my dear brethren, thank goodness, the new *Ordo Missae* and a new, lighter version of Catholicism. That is how we began the conversation with him, and he started to explain to me that when he said the Tridentine Mass, he felt enslaved by the rubrics, that he has to do something, perform some gestures, say some prayers. "But when I say the new *Ordo Missae*" — so that priest explained to me — "I am a free man. I can do what I want and as I want."

A man in his eighties, a priest formed in the traditional seminary. And it was, my dear brethren, painful to look at: grey-haired, at the end of his life, and so fixed on the revolution, a faithful devotee of this October revolution in the Church that the Second Vatican Council was, that nothing got through to him. Not even that fact, visible to the naked eye, got through to him. This seminary, which in his time had been full and had been a seminary, has become empty, has become a pilgrims' house. And that priest, my dear brethren, was not able to connect the facts, to ask himself the question: why is this seminary empty, why am I not the rector, a professor of the seminary, but only the director of a pilgrims' house, occupied with looking after groups of pilgrims?

PRAYER FOR PERSEVERANCE

This is, my dear brethren, an illustration, a good illustration, of what we hear today in the Book of Ezekiel. The just man who leaves the path of justice, that is, who ceases to give to God what is due to God, and enters the path of iniquity. Instead of bowing down to God, he bows down to man. A man completely lost. A priest who does not understand the meaning of his priesthood. He does not understand what the priesthood is, he does not understand what he is called to.

Dear faithful, but we are, after all, perfectly aware that such stories could be enumerated and told for hours on end, for days on end. These are, after all, millions, millions of Catholics all over the world who abandoned the path of justice, who abandoned the religion of God and clung to the religion of man.

Dear faithful, we must therefore pray fervently today for perseverance in the faith and perseverance in grace until death. What matters most is how we end our life. For even if we live for many years in a seemingly pious way, if it is not true piety, if we do not have the grace of faith, then at the hour of death we will fall into the claws of the devil. And do not count on the devil one day simply leaving you alone. Saint Peter teaches us all: the devil, like a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour. Until the end of your life he will prowl around you, in order to attack, to try to seize you in his trap. "Let him that thinketh himself to stand take heed lest he fall," writes Saint Paul. It is so important, my dear brethren, that we pray for perseverance in faith and grace until death, that we obtain it for ourselves through prayer. All the more so since we have before our eyes examples, dozens, hundreds, thousands of examples of people who left the path of justice and entered the path of iniquity, and then all those good, just deeds of theirs will not be remembered, and in the transgression by which they transgressed and in their sin which they committed, they will die — I am paraphrasing the words we have just heard in the lesson.

THE POOL OF BETHESDA

Dear faithful, today's Gospel confirms, as it were, what I have just said. We observe the story of that unhappy man who has been sick for 38 years. Not three days, not three months, not three years. For 38 years he lies paralysed beside the pool in Jerusalem, beside the pool of Bethesda. 38 years. Dreadful, something horrifying, when we think about it. But it would be a mistake if we limited this Gospel story, which we have just heard, only to the dimension of bodily healing. The Lord Jesus does indeed heal this man, He commands him to take up his bed and walk. After 38 years this poor man rises by his own strength, walks on his own legs.

But, my dear brethren, we must pay attention to one small detail. When Christ turns to this man, He indicates what was the cause of his misfortune: "Behold, thou art made whole. Sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee." Sin no more. It was sin that brought the illness upon this man. This illness proved to be salutary, because for those 38 years he did penance. During those 38 years he earned the healing not only of the body, but above all of the soul. Christ heals his soul. This bodily illness, what is external, was an image of what was happening inside this man. He was paralysed, enslaved by sin, bound by the chains of sin, and was not able to move forward. And it was a punishment for sin, it was a consequence of sin. And today, my dear brethren, he is set free not only from bodily illness, but above all from spiritual illness. But at the same time Christ warns him: "Sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee." What worse thing? Eternal death.

And so, my dear brethren, in listening to the story of this man, we too are called, stirred up, to pray for perseverance in faith and in God's grace. If we do not value faith and grace, we will lose them. Then we will die in unbelief, in disgrace.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This Lent, my dear brethren, is the time of one great examination of conscience. It is a time for asking ourselves the question: am I a just man, am I walking the paths of justice, or does it only seem so to me? The problem is that a whole mass of people, a whole mass of Catholics, live in a world other than the real world. We live by our ideas of ourselves. We do not ask ourselves questions, we do not realise what we are really like, but prefer to live by a certain image, created by ourselves, of what we would like to be. And when for many years we live like this with our artificially created image, we come unstuck more and more from reality. We are not able to stand in the truth, we are not able to see ourselves as we are.

And a whole mass, my dear brethren, of Catholics, both those post-conciliar pseudo-Catholics and the so-called traditionalists, are in precisely such a state, one terribly dangerous for the soul. They live in an illusion, not in reality. It seems to them that they are walking the paths of justice, while in reality they are sinking into injustice, into wickedness. And this Lent of the year of the Lord 2026 may be for many a soul the last opportunity to wake up from this sleep, to ask the question and answer it for oneself honestly: am I walking the paths of justice? Am I walking the paths of God? Or perhaps I turned away from justice long ago and am committing iniquity that seems to me to be justice, which I powder with a thick layer of lies.

My dear brethren, we must give thanks for this further Lent in our life, for this further opportunity for conversion, for turning back from the paths we have chosen for ourselves, for returning to the paths of God. But we must also ask fervently, and to this the Holy Church calls us today, for the grace of perseverance. Even if today you really are walking the path of justice, if you fall into pride, into self-love, you can leave that path very quickly and not even notice when you fall into iniquity. I repeat, how many examples the history of recent years gives us of people who began well and ended wretchedly, and may we not be among such poor wretches. For Christ the Lord addresses a word to each one of us: "Behold, thou art made whole. Sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee."

Amen.

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