CATHOLIC HOPE AND PRESUMPTUOUS CONFIDENCE

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Beloved in Christ the Lord! It is natural and understandable that unbelievers, people whose lives resemble a ship at sea in a storm, a ship deprived of the light of a lighthouse, so often, especially in our times, fall into spiritual doubt and even spiritual despair. But what is incomprehensible and appalling is that so many Catholics, so many baptised people, so many people to whom the light of God's grace has been given, live today exactly as if they were pagans. They live as if God did not exist, as if His words and promises were worth nothing.

And yet the Lord, as our own experience of life proves to us, is far more faithful and far better to us even than — so it would seem to us — a human friend whom we have trusted completely. For in God, my dear brethren, there is not the slightest shadow of falsehood or of evil. Where we might expect righteous anger, where we have deserved punishment, when the Lord God sees our sorrow, our contrition, our resolution to amend, there, instead of punishing, He forgives; there He holds out His hand to us and helps us to rise. And rightly did the Acts of the Apostles describe the life of the Son of God here on earth in very brief but most eloquent words: "He went about doing good." This matchless goodness of Christ, of which we are witnesses today as well, as we observe the two healings, ought to move each one of us, every believing Catholic, unceasingly to a childlike trust in our Father who is in heaven.

HOPE PLEASING TO GOD

But, my dear brethren, we must also constantly remind ourselves, especially in this time of universal confusion, which we experience so painfully every day, that not every hope is good, not every hope is pleasing to the Lord God. For the Catholic catechism teaches us that excessive, or even presumptuous, confidence is sinful. And yet a wave of precisely such presumptuous confidence, presumptuous hope, has flooded the modern world, has flooded the post-conciliar Neo-Church, a world which brazenly demands of the Lord God mercy without justice, forgiveness without penance, morality without principles, a Church without laws, faith without dogmas.

That is why, my dear brethren, precisely in this time of confusion we must make every effort that our hope, our confidence, be truly Catholic. But what does this mean? What kind of confidence in the Lord God is good? What kind of confidence in the Lord God should we cultivate in ourselves? And the answer to this question we find in today's Gospel.

A REVERENT, LIMITLESS HOPE

First, my dear brethren, our hope should be full of reverence. *Initium sapientiae timor Domini* — the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Look with what respect the leper approaches the Redeemer. First, as soon as he draws near to the Most Holy One, he falls on his face and does Him homage. Then he does not insist, he does not demand, but humbly asks: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Look at the centurion, a proud Roman soldier, who comes to Our Lord today not to give Him an order, but with reverence, almost timidly, begs the Saviour to work a miracle, to heal his gravely ill servant. And when he hears that the Saviour wishes to answer his request, that He is setting out for his house, he speaks those most beautiful words which have entered, have become part of the liturgy of the Holy Mass: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word."

And so, my dear brethren, we come to the second characteristic that should distinguish our Catholic hope, our confidence in the Lord God, namely that it should be without limit. Note that the leper says to Our Lord: "If Thou wilt, Thou canst." Between those words there is room only for the ardent feeling

of the boundless confidence of a sinful man in an almighty and merciful God. So too the centurion, who knows with his whole heart that a single word of Our Lord is enough for it to be done.

How very different we, Catholics of today, are from that leper and from that centurion! We, who wish to dictate to the Lord God what He is to do and when, who still have the name of Jesus on our lips, but whose hearts remain closed to Our Lord; there is no room for Him there, because we know everything better and would like to make a puppet of the Lord God, which we humans would control. We do, it is true, say every day in the Our Father: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," but we accept, we receive the will of God only for as long as it is in accord with our own will. And if it turns out that the Lord God wishes to send us some difficult trials, crosses that we do not want, then we rebel against God, we despise the will of God, we reject it and trample on it.

A CHILDLIKE HOPE

Finally, my dear brethren, the third characteristic that should distinguish our truly Catholic confidence in the Lord God, namely that our hope should be sincere, like that of a child. Neither the leper nor the centurion calculates, reckons, or wonders whether it is worth their while to set out to meet Our Lord, or whether they will surely obtain what they want. It is precisely at the sight of their childlike trust that Christ the Lord works the miracle. First He stretches out His hand and touches the leper, and speaks in answer to his request the words: "I will; be thou made clean." Then He says to the centurion: "Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee." And the centurion, full of a faith which one would have sought in vain among the perfidious Jews, goes home certain that he will find there what he asked Our Lord for.

My beloved, this is how our hope, our devotion to the Lord God, should be in this time of confusion that we are living through: full of reverence, without limit, and sincere like a child's. And the fruit of such true hope will be true peace of heart, which the world cannot give, which the world and its sons do not understand, and which the world, without our consent, will never be able to take from us.

And we must pray, my dear brethren, on this Third Sunday after Epiphany, that we may never lack this true Catholic hope, this hope that will prevent us from falling into either of two exceedingly dangerous extremes. For on the one hand Satan today pushes so many souls toward the abyss of doubt and despair; he whispers into people's ears exceedingly tempting words: "Give up the fight, give up further efforts, why do you wear yourself out, it is all pointless, it is all in vain." And on the other hand, my dear brethren, so many souls today give in to the other extreme, namely they begin to nurture a presumptuous hope in Our Lord, and so to mock Him, to mock God's justice. And we must guard against these two extremes, for otherwise we shall share the lot of those faithless Jews of two thousand years ago, who will not enter the Kingdom but will be cast out into the exterior darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And may we, Catholics, confessors of Christ, never share that lot. From which only one thing can preserve us: that we truly trust in the Lord God as Catholics, and surrender ourselves to Him.

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