THE PRE-LENT ALARM AGAINST SPIRITUAL SLOTH

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Dear faithful, on this Septuagesima Sunday, 70 days before the greatest feast of the Catholic Church, before the feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord, we begin the season of pre-Lent, a season that was eliminated from the post-conciliar liturgical calendar, a season meant to prepare us for Lent, so that we are not taken by surprise when Ash Wednesday arrives. And during this pre-Lenten time the holy Church commands priests to put on violet vestments for Holy Mass, the colour of penance. The joyful hymn *Gloria in excelsis* is not sung. The joyful cry *Alleluia* falls silent. The holy Church, already today, 70 days before Easter, turns our thoughts toward penance, a word so utterly foreign to modern man, a word that fits so badly with the modern world, but also with the post-conciliar church, which preaches mercy without justice, which preaches universal salvation, which preaches that hell is empty, or perhaps does not exist at all.

Behold Maundy Thursday of the year of Our Lord 2018. The Argentinian Jesuit gave yet another scandalous interview to his friend, the hardened Italian atheist Scalfari. The journalist asked: "His Holiness has never spoken about souls who die in sin and go to hell to suffer eternal punishment. He has spoken instead about good souls, admitted to the contemplation of God. But what about the bad souls? Where are they punished?" And the Argentinian Jesuit replied: "They are not punished. Those who repent receive God's forgiveness and go among the ranks of souls who contemplate Him. But those who do not repent disappear. Hell does not exist; what exists is the disappearance of sinful souls."

Is that the teaching of the Church? My dear brethren, the teaching of the Church is of course entirely different. Rewarding good deeds and punishing evil deeds is the foundation, the basis of any morality whatsoever. Evil is to be rewarded, evil is to be punished, good is to be rewarded. And so Pope Benedict XII, in the constitution *Benedictus Deus* in 1336, in accord with the age-old teaching of the Church, declared: "Moreover, I declare that, according to the general disposition of God, the souls of those who die in actual mortal sin go down to hell immediately after their death, where they suffer the torments of hell."

The great son of the Franciscan Order, Saint Bonaventure, used to say that even if God were to reveal to him that only one single soul in the whole world would be damned, he would not give up a single penitential practice that he had performed in his life, because he could never be certain that he himself would not be that damned soul. The Most Holy Mother and the saints warned us many times that hell exists and is not empty, that souls fall into eternal fire. Saint Peter asks with pastoral concern: "If the righteous man is saved with difficulty, where will the ungodly and the sinner be found?"

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Dear faithful, if we want to save our souls, if we want to be saved, we must cooperate zealously with God's grace every day of our lives. "Many are called, but few are chosen." It is not so. What are so many supposed Catholics counting on today? That one can idle away one's whole life, that one can go one's whole life without caring for one's soul, and somehow the Lord God will surely have to take us with Him to heaven? We often get angry at other people when we see their laziness, when we see how they do not apply themselves to their work. So do we not resemble such lazy people in our spiritual life? We supposedly want to improve, but not today, maybe tomorrow. We supposedly want to change, but not too much. And this spiritual laziness can prove a mortal danger for more than one Catholic, especially in a time when so many post-conciliar priests also confirm us in the conviction that penance is unnecessary, that the Lord God loves every man.

Indeed, the Lord God loves every man and grieves to see how souls fall into the fire of hell. Our Lord, for the sake of our salvation, did everything He could.

He became man, gave us an example of life, taught, offered Himself in the sacrifice of the Cross, in the propitiatory sacrifice on the altar of the Cross, remained with us in the Most Blessed Sacrament, and established the Catholic Church. And we, beside all this, beside the Saviour, pass by indifferently: not today, maybe tomorrow, maybe someday I will take You seriously.

A man who wants to buy himself a house can save for long years. A woman who wants to achieve her dream figure can go for months eating almost nothing. An athlete, for a moment of glory, for a piece of metal or plastic, can train for years on end, because we know perfectly well that if we want to achieve something, we must commit ourselves. We must sacrifice something. And what about our soul? It lies fallow, like a field without a farmer. And does Saint Paul the Apostle not admonish us today: "Everyone who goes into a contest abstains from everything. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one"?

Dear faithful, today, on the threshold of pre-Lent, on this Septuagesima Sunday, an alarm clock is ringing, meant to tear us out of our spiritual torpor, out of our spiritual indifference, to sweep us into a spiritual marathon in which we should run so as to earn for ourselves an imperishable crown, the reward of eternal life. Perhaps this pre-Lent of the year 2025 will be our last opportunity to tend the field of our soul, overgrown with weeds. Today the farmer of the Gospel, who is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, calls us to work in His vineyard. It does not matter whether you are old or young, healthy or sick, poor or rich. What matters is that you work in the Lord's vineyard with zeal, with commitment, that you answer the call of the Divine Master of the vineyard seriously, with all your strength, with your whole mind and heart.

May we, my dear brethren, not have to be ashamed at the Last Judgment of our spiritual laziness. May we not have to be ashamed that we sat idle while the Saviour was calling us to His vineyard. *Tempus fugit*, *aeternitas manet*. Time flies, eternity waits.

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