

The Little Number of Those Who Are Saved

by St. Leonard of Port Maurice

Saint Leonard of Port Maurice was a most holy Franciscan friar who lived at the monastery of Saint Bonaventure in Rome. He was one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church. He used to preach to thousands in the open square of every city and town where the churches could not hold his listeners. So brilliant and holy was his eloquence that once when he gave a two weeks' mission in Rome, the Pope and College of Cardinals came to hear him. The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus were his crusades. He was in no small way responsible for the definition of the Immaculate Conception made a little more than a hundred years after his death. He also gave us the Divine Praises, which are said at the end of Benediction. But Saint Leonard's most famous work was his devotion to the Stations of the Cross. He died a most holy death in his seventy-fifth year, after twenty-four years of uninterrupted preaching.

One of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice's most famous sermons was "The Little Number of Those Who Are Saved." It was the one he relied on for the conversion of great sinners. This sermon, like his other writings, was submitted to canonical examination during the process of canonization. In it he reviews the various states of life of Christians and concludes with the little number of those who are saved, in relation to the totality of men.

The reader who meditates on this remarkable text will grasp the soundness of its argumentation, which has earned it the approbation of the Church. Here is the great missionary's vibrant and moving sermon.

Introduction

Thanks be to God, the number of the Redeemer's disciples is not so small that the wickedness of the Scribes and Pharisees is able to triumph over them. Although they strove to calumniate innocence and to deceive the crowd with their treacherous sophistries by discrediting the doctrine and character of Our Lord, finding spots even in the sun, many still recognized Him as the true Messiah, and, unafraid of either chastisements or threats, openly joined His cause. Did all those who followed Christ follow Him even unto glory? Oh, this is where I revere the profound mystery and silently adore the abysses of the divine decrees, rather than rashly deciding on such a great point! The subject I will be treating today is a very grave one; it has caused even the pillars of the Church to tremble, filled the greatest Saints with terror and populated the deserts with anchorites. The point of this instruction is to decide whether the number of Christians who are saved is greater or less than the number of Christians who are damned; it will, I hope, produce in you a salutary fear of the judgments of God.

Brothers, because of the love I have for you, I wish I were able to reassure you with the prospect of eternal happiness by saying to each of you: You are certain to go to

paradise; the greater number of Christians is saved, so you also will be saved. But how can I give you this sweet assurance if you revolt against God's decrees as though you were your own worst enemies? I observe in God a sincere desire to save you, but I find in you a decided inclination to be damned. So what will I be doing today if I speak clearly? I will be displeasing to you. But if I do not speak, I will be displeasing to God.

Therefore, I will divide this subject into two points. In the first one, to fill you with dread, I will let the theologians and Fathers of the Church decide on the matter and declare that the greater number of Christian adults are damned; and, in silent adoration of that terrible mystery, I will keep my own sentiments to myself. In the second point I will attempt to defend the goodness of God versus the godless, by proving to you that those who are damned are damned by their own malice, because they wanted to be damned. So then, here are two very important truths. If the first truth frightens you, do not hold it against me, as though I wanted to make the road of heaven narrower for you, for I want to be neutral in this matter; rather, hold it against the theologians and Fathers of the Church who will engrave this truth in your heart by the force of reason. If you are disillusioned by the second truth, give thanks to God over it, for He wants only one thing: that you give your hearts totally to Him. Finally, if you oblige me to tell you clearly what I think, I will do so for your consolation.

The Teaching of the Fathers of the Church

It is not vain curiosity but salutary precaution to proclaim from the height of the pulpit certain truths which serve wonderfully to contain the indolence of libertines, who are always talking about the mercy of God and about how easy it is to convert, who live plunged in all sorts of sins and are soundly sleeping on the road to hell. To disillusion them and waken them from their torpor, today let us examine this great question: Is the number of Christians who are saved greater than the number of Christians who are damned?

Pious souls, you may leave; this sermon is not for you. Its sole purpose is to contain the pride of libertines who cast the holy fear of God out of their heart and join forces with the devil who, according to the sentiment of Eusebius, damns souls by reassuring them. To resolve this doubt, let us put the Fathers of the Church, both Greek and Latin, on one side; on the other, the most learned theologians and erudite historians; and let us put the Bible in the middle for all to see. Now listen not to what I will say to you ∃ for I have already told you that I do not want to speak for myself or decide on the matter ∃ but listen to what these great minds have to tell you, they who are beacons in the Church of God to give light to others so that they will not miss the road to heaven. In this manner, guided by the triple light of faith, authority and reason, we will be able to resolve this grave matter with certainty.

Note well that there is no question here of the human race taken as a whole, nor of all Catholics taken without distinction, but only of Catholic adults, who have free choice and are thus capable of cooperating in the great matter of their salvation. First let us consult the theologians recognized as examining things most carefully and as not exaggerating in their teaching: let us listen to two learned cardinals, Cajetan and Bellarmine. They teach that the greater number of Christian adults are damned, and if I had the time to point out the reasons upon which they base themselves, you would be convinced of it yourselves. But I will limit myself here to quoting Suarez. After

consulting all the theologians and making a diligent study of the matter, he wrote, "*The most common sentiment which is held is that, among Christians, there are more damned souls than predestined souls.*"

Add the authority of the Greek and Latin Fathers to that of the theologians, and you will find that almost all of them say the same thing. This is the sentiment of Saint Theodore, Saint Basil, Saint Ephrem, and Saint John Chrysostom. What is more, according to Baronius it was a common opinion among the Greek Fathers that this truth was expressly revealed to Saint Simeon Stylites and that after this revelation, it was to secure his salvation that he decided to live standing on top of a pillar for forty years, exposed to the weather, a model of penance and holiness for everyone. Now let us consult the Latin Fathers. You will hear Saint Gregory saying clearly, "Many attain to faith, but few to the heavenly kingdom." Saint Anselm declares, "*There are few who are saved.*" Saint Augustine states even more clearly, "*Therefore, few are saved in comparison to those who are damned.*" The most terrifying, however, is Saint Jerome. At the end of his life, in the presence of his disciples, he spoke these dreadful words: "*Out of one hundred thousand **people whose lives have always been bad**, you will find barely one who is worthy of indulgence.*"

The Words of Holy Scripture

But why seek out the opinions of the Fathers and theologians, when Holy Scripture settles the question so clearly? Look in to the Old and New Testaments, and you will find a multitude of figures, symbols and words that clearly point out this truth: very few are saved. In the time of Noah, the entire human race was submerged by the Deluge, and only eight people were saved in the Ark. Saint Peter says, "*This ark was the figure of the Church,*" while Saint Augustine adds, "*And these eight people who were saved signify that very few Christians are saved, **because there are very few who sincerely renounce the world**, and those who renounce it only in words do not belong to the mystery represented by that ark.*" The Bible also tells us that only two Hebrews out of two million entered the Promised Land after going out of Egypt, and that only four escaped the fire of Sodom and the other burning cities that perished with it. All of this means that the number of the damned who will be cast into fire like straw is far greater than that of the saved, whom the heavenly Father will one day gather into His barns like precious wheat.

I would not finish if I had to point out all the figures by which Holy Scripture confirms this truth; let us content ourselves with listening to the living oracle of Incarnate Wisdom. What did Our Lord answer the curious man in the Gospel who asked Him, "*Lord, is it only a few to be saved?*" Did He keep silence? Did He answer haltingly? Did He conceal His thought for fear of frightening the crowd? No. Questioned by only one, He addresses all of those present. He says to them: "You ask Me if there are only few who are saved?" Here is My answer: "*Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*" Who is speaking here? It is the Son of God, Eternal Truth, who on another occasion says even more clearly, "*Many are called, but few are chosen.*" He does not say that all are called and that out of all men, few are chosen, but that many are called; which means, as Saint Gregory explains, that out of all men, many are called to the True Faith, but out of them few are saved. Brothers, these are the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Are they clear? They are true. Tell me now if it is possible for you to have faith in your heart and not tremble.

Salvation in the Various States of Life

But oh, I see that by speaking in this manner of all in general, I am missing my point. So let us apply this truth to various states, and you will understand that you must either throw away reason, experience and the common sense of the faithful, or confess that the greater number of Catholics is damned. Is there any state in the world more favorable to innocence in which salvation seems easier and of which people have a higher idea than that of priests, the lieutenants of God? At first glance, who would not think that most of them are not only good but even perfect; yet I am horror-struck when I hear Saint Jerome declaring that although the world is full of priests, barely one in a hundred is living in a manner in conformity with state; when I hear a servant of God attesting that he has learned by revelation that the number of priests who fall into hell each day is so great that it seemed impossible to him that there be any left on earth; when I hear Saint Chrysostom exclaiming with tears in his eyes, "*I do not believe that many priests are saved; I believe the contrary, that the number of those who are damned is greater.*"

Look higher still, and see the prelates of the Holy Church, pastors who have the charge of souls. Is the number of those who are saved among them greater than the number of those who are damned? Listen to Cantimpre; he will relate an event to you, and you may draw the conclusions. There was a synod being held in Paris, and a great number of prelates and pastors who had the charge of souls were in attendance; the king and princes also came to add luster to that assembly by their presence. A famous preacher was invited to preach. While he was preparing his sermon, a horrible demon appeared to him and said, "*Lay your books aside. If you want to give a sermon that will be useful to these princes and prelates, content yourself with telling them on our part, 'We the princes of darkness thank you, princes, prelates, and pastors of souls, that due to your negligence, the greater number of the faithful are damned; also, we are saving a reward for you for this favor, when you shall be with us in Hell.'*"

Woe to you who command others! If so many are damned by your fault, what will happen to you? If few out of those who are first in the Church of God are saved, what will happen to you? Take all states, both sexes, every condition: husbands, wives, widows, young women, young men, soldiers, merchants, craftsmen, rich and poor, noble and plebian. What are we to say about all these people who are living so badly? The following narrative from Saint Vincent Ferrer will show you what you may think about it. He relates that an archdeacon in Lyons gave up his charge and retreated into a desert place to do penance, and that he died the same day and hour as Saint Bernard. After his death, he appeared to his bishop and said to him, "*Know, Monsignor, that at the very hour I passed away, **thirty-three thousand** people also died. Out of this number, **Bernard and myself** went up to heaven without delay, **three** went to purgatory, and **all the others fell into Hell.***"

Our chronicles relate an even more dreadful happening. One of our brothers, well-known for his doctrine and holiness, was preaching in Germany. He represented the ugliness of the sin of impurity so forceful that a woman fell dead of sorrow in front of everyone. Then, coming back to life, she said, "*When I was presented before the Tribunal of God, **sixty thousand** people arrived at the same time from all parts of the world; out of that number, **three** were saved by going to Purgatory, and **all the rest were damned.***"

O abyss of the judgments of God! Out of thirty thousand, only five were saved! And out of sixty thousand, only three went to heaven! You sinners who are listening to me, in what category will you be numbered?... What do you say?... What do you think?...

I see almost all of you lowering your heads, filled with astonishment and horror. But let us lay our stupor aside, and instead of flattering ourselves, let us try to draw some profit from our fear. Is it not true that there are two roads which lead to heaven: innocence and repentance? Now, if I show you that very few take either one of these two roads, as rational people you will conclude that very few are saved. And to mention proofs: in what age, employment or condition will you find that the number of the wicked is not a hundred times greater than that of the good, and about which one might say, "*The good are so rare and the wicked are so great in number*"? We could say of our times what Salvianus said of his: it is easier to find a countless multitude of sinners immersed in all sorts of iniquities than a few innocent men. How many servants are totally honest and faithful in their duties? How many merchants are fair and equitable in their commerce; how many craftsmen exact and truthful; how many salesmen disinterested and sincere? How many men of law do not forsake equity? How many soldiers do not tread upon innocence; how many masters do not unjustly withhold the salary of those who serve them, or do not seek to dominate their inferiors? Everywhere, the good are rare and the wicked great in number. Who does not know that today there is so much libertinage among mature men, liberty among young girls, vanity among women, licentiousness in the nobility, corruption in the middle class, dissolution in the people, impudence among the poor, that one could say what David said of his times: "*All alike have gone astray... there is not even one who does good, not even one.*"

Go into street and square, into palace and house, into city and countryside, into tribunal and court of law, and even into the temple of God. Where will you find virtue? "*Alas!*" cries Salvianus, "*except for a very little number who flee evil, what is the assembly of Christians if not a sink of vice?*" All that we can find everywhere is selfishness, ambition, gluttony, and luxury. Is not the greater portion of men defiled by the vice of impurity, and is not Saint John right in saying, "*The whole world* ∃ if something so foul may be called ∃ "*is seated in wickedness?*" I am not the one who is telling you; reason obliges you to believe that out of those who are living so badly, very few are saved.

But you will say: Can penance not profitably repair the loss of innocence? That is true, I admit. But I also know that penance is so difficult in practice, we have lost the habit so completely, and it is so badly abused by sinners, that this alone should suffice to convince you that very few are saved by that path. Oh, how steep, narrow, thorny, horrible to behold and hard to climb it is! Everywhere we look, we see traces of blood and things that recall sad memories. Many weaken at the very sight of it. Many retreat at the very start. Many fall from weariness in the middle, and many give up wretchedly at the end. And how few are they who persevere in it till death! Saint Ambrose says it is easier to find men who have kept their innocence than to find any who have done fitting penance.

If you consider the sacrament of penance, there are so many distorted confessions, so many studied excuses, so many deceitful repentances, so many false promises, so many ineffective resolutions, so many invalid absolutions! Would you regard as valid the confession of someone who accuses himself of sins of impurity and still holds to the occasion of them? Or someone who accuses himself of obvious injustices with no

intention of making any reparation whatsoever for them? Or someone who falls again into the same iniquities right after going to confession? Oh, horrible abuses of such a great sacrament! One confesses to avoid excommunication, another to make a reputation as a penitent. One rids himself of his sins to calm his remorse, another conceals them out of shame. One accuses them imperfectly out of malice, another discloses them out of habit. One does not have the true end of the sacrament in mind, another is lacking the necessary sorrow, and still another firm purpose. Poor confessors, what efforts you make to bring the greater number of penitents to these resolutions and acts, without which confession is a sacrilege, absolution a condemnation and penance an illusion?

Where are they now, those who believe that the number of the saved among Christians is greater than that of the damned and who, to authorize their opinion, reason thus: the greater portion of Catholic adults die in their beds armed with the sacraments of the Church, therefore most adult Catholics are saved? Oh, what fine reasoning! You must say exactly the opposite. Most Catholic adults confess badly at death, therefore most of them are damned. I say "all the more certain," because a dying person who has not confessed well when he was in good health will have an even harder time doing so when he is in bed with a heavy heart, an unsteady head, a muddled mind; when he is opposed in many ways by still-living objects, by still-fresh occasions, by adopted habits, and above all by devils who are seeking every means to cast him into hell. Now, if you add to all these false penitents all the other sinners who die unexpectedly in sin, due to the doctors' ignorance or by their relatives' fault, who die from poisoning or from being buried in earthquakes, or from a stroke, or from a fall, or on the battlefield, in a fight, caught in a trap, struck by lightning, burned or drowned, are you not obliged to conclude that most Christian adults are damned? That is the reasoning of Saint Chrysostom. This Saint says that most Christians are walking on the road to hell throughout their life. Why, then, are you so surprised that the greater number goes to hell? To come to a door, you must take the road that leads there. What have you to answer such a powerful reason?

The answer, you will tell me, is that the mercy of God is great. Yes, for those who fear Him, says the Prophet; but great is His justice for the one who does not fear Him, and it condemns all obstinate sinners.

So you will say to me: Well then, who is Paradise for, if not for Christians? It is for Christians, of course, but for those who do not dishonor their character and who live as Christians. Moreover, if to the number of Christian adults who die in the grace of God, you add the countless host of children who die after baptism and before reaching the age of reason, you will not be surprised that Saint John the Apostle, speaking of those who are saved, says, "*I saw a great multitude which no man could number.*"

And this is what deceives those who pretend that the number of the saved among Catholics is greater than that of the damned... If to that number, you add the adults who have kept the robe of innocence, or who after having defiled it, have washed it in the tears of penance, it is certain that the greater number is saved; and that explains the words of Saint John, "*I saw a great multitude,*" and these other words of Our Lord, "*Many will come from the east and from the west, and will feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,*" and the other figures usually cited in favor of that opinion. But if you are talking about Christian adults, experience, reason, authority, propriety and Scripture all agree in proving that the greater number is damned. Do not believe that because of this, paradise is empty; on the contrary, it is

a very populous kingdom. And if the damned are "*as numerous as the sand in the sea,*" the saved are "*as numerous as the stars of heaven,*" that is, both the one and the other are countless, although in very different proportions.

One day Saint John Chrysostom, preaching in the cathedral in Constantinople and considering these proportions, could not help but shudder in horror and ask, "*Out of this great number of people, how many do you think will be saved?*" And, not waiting for an answer, he added, "*Among so many thousands of people, we would not find a hundred who are saved, and I even doubt for the one hundred.*" What a dreadful thing! The great Saint believed that out of so many people, barely one hundred would be saved; and even then, he was not sure of that number. What will happen to you who are listening to me? Great God, I cannot think of it without shuddering! Brothers, the problem of salvation is a very difficult thing; for according to the maxims of the theologians, when an end demands great efforts, few only attain it.

That is why Saint Thomas, the Angelic Doctor, after weighing all the reasons pro and con in his immense erudition, finally concludes that the greater number of Catholic adults are damned. He says, "*Because eternal beatitude surpasses the natural state, especially since it has been deprived of original grace, it is the little number that are saved.*"

So then, remove the blindfold from your eyes that is blinding you with self-love, that is keeping you from believing such an obvious truth by giving you very false ideas concerning the justice of God, "*Just Father, the world has not known Thee,*" said Our Lord Jesus Christ. He does not say "*Almighty Father, most good and merciful Father.*" He says "**just Father,**" so we may understand that out of all the attributes of God, none is less known than His justice, because men refuse to believe what they are afraid to undergo. Therefore, remove the blindfold that is covering your eyes and say tearfully: Alas! The greater number of Catholics, the greater number of those who live here, perhaps even those who are in this assembly, will be damned! What subject could be more deserving of your tears?

King Xerxes, standing on a hill looking at his army of one hundred thousand soldiers in battle array, and considering that out of all of them there would be not one man alive in a hundred years, was unable to hold back his tears. Have we not more reason to weep upon thinking that out of so many Catholics, the greater number will be damned? Should this thought not make our eyes pour forth rivers of tears, or at least produce in our heart the sentiment of compassion felt by an Augustinian Brother, Ven. Marcellus of St. Dominic? One day as he was meditating on the eternal pains, the Lord showed him how many souls were going to hell at that moment and had him see a very broad road on which twenty-two thousand reprobates were running toward the abyss, colliding into one another. The servant of God was stupefied at the sight and exclaimed, "*Oh, what a number! What a number! And still more are coming. O Jesus! O Jesus! What madness!*" Let me repeat with Jeremiah, "*Who will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes? And I will weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.*"

Poor souls! How can you run so hastily toward hell? For mercy's sake, stop and listen to me for a moment! Either you understand what it means to be saved and to be damned for all eternity, or you do not. If you understand and in spite of that, you do not decide to change your life today, make a good confession and trample upon the world, in a word, make your every effort to be counted among the littler number of those who are saved, I say that you do not have the faith. You are more excusable if

you do not understand it, for then one must say that you are out of your mind. ***To be saved for all eternity, to be damned for all eternity, and to not make your every effort to avoid the one and make sure of the other, is something inconceivable.***

The Goodness of God

Perhaps you do not yet believe the terrible truths I have just taught you. But it is the most highly-considered theologians, the most illustrious Fathers who have spoken to you through me. So then, how can you resist reasons supported by so many examples and words of Scripture? If you still hesitate in spite of that, and if your mind is inclined to the opposite opinion, does that very consideration not suffice to make you tremble? Oh, it shows that you do not care very much for your salvation! In this important matter, a sensible man is struck more strongly by the slightest doubt of the risk he runs than by the evidence of total ruin in other affairs in which the soul is not involved. One of our brothers, Blessed Giles, was in the habit of saying that if only one man were going to be damned, he would do all he could to make sure he was not that man.

So what must we do, we who know that the greater number is going to be damned, and not only out of all Catholics? What must we do? Take the resolution to belong to the little number of those who are saved. You say: If Christ wanted to damn me, then why did He create me? Silence, rash tongue! God did not create anyone to damn him; but whoever is damned, is damned because he wants to be. Therefore, I will now strive to defend the goodness of my God and acquit it of all blame: that will be the subject of the second point.

Before going on, let us gather on one side all the books and all the heresies of Luther and Calvin, and on the other side the books and heresies of the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, and let us burn them. Some destroy grace, others freedom, and all are filled with errors; so let us cast them into the fire. All the damned bear upon their brow the oracle of the Prophet Osee, "*Thy damnation comes from thee,*" so that they may understand that whoever is damned, is damned by his own malice and because he wants to be damned.

First let us take these two undeniable truths as a basis: "**God wants all men to be saved,**" "**All are in need of the grace of God.**" Now, if I show you that God wants to save all men, and that for this purpose He gives all of them His grace and all the other necessary means of obtaining that sublime end, you will be obliged to agree that whoever is damned must impute it to his own malice, and that if the greater number of Christians are damned, it is because they want to be. "*Thy damnation comes from thee; thy help is only in Me.*"

God Desires All Men to be Saved

In a hundred places in Holy Scripture, God tells us that it is truly His desire to save all men. "*Is it My will that a sinner should die, and not that he should be converted from his ways and live?... I live, saith the Lord God. I desire not the death of the sinner. Be converted and live.*" When someone wants something very much, it is said that he is dying with desire; it is a hyperbole. But God has wanted and still wants our salvation so much that He died of desire, and He suffered death to give us life. This

will to save all men is therefore not an affected, superficial and apparent will in God; it is a real, effective, and beneficial will; for He provides us with all the means most proper for us to be saved. He does not give them to us so they will not obtain it; He gives them to us with a sincere will, with the intention that they may obtain their effect. And if they do not obtain it, He shows Himself afflicted and offended over it. He commands even the damned to use them in order to be saved; He exhorts them to it; He obliges them to it; and if they do not do it, they sin. Therefore, they may do it and thus be saved.

Far more, because God sees that we could not even make use of His grace without His help, He gives us other aids; and if they sometimes remain ineffective, it is our fault; for with these same aids, one may abuse them and be damned with them, and another may do right and be saved; he might even be saved with less powerful aids. Yes, it can happen that we abuse a greater grace and are damned, whereas another cooperates with a lesser grace and is saved.

Saint Augustine exclaims, *"If, therefore, someone turns aside from justice, he is carried by his free will, led by his concupiscence, deceived by his own persuasion."* But for those who do not understand theology, here is what I have to say to them: God is so good that when He sees a sinner running to his ruin, He runs after him, calls him, entreats and accompanies him even to the gates of hell; what will He not do to convert him? He sends him good inspirations and holy thoughts, and if he does not profit from them, He becomes angry and indignant, He pursues him. Will He strike him? No. He beats at the air and forgives him. But the sinner is not converted yet. God sends him a mortal illness. It is certainly all over for him. No, brothers, God heals him; the sinner becomes obstinate in evil, and God in His mercy looks for another way; He gives him another year, and when that year is over, He grants him yet another.

But if the sinner still wants to cast himself into hell in spite of all that, what does God do? Does He abandon him? No. He takes him by the hand; and while he has one foot in hell and the other outside, He still preaches to him, He implored him not to abuse His graces. Now I ask you, if that man is damned, is it not true that he is damned against the Will of God and because he wants to be damned? Come and ask me now: If God wanted to damn me, then why did He create me?

Ungrateful sinner, learn today that if you are damned, it is not God who is to blame, but you and your self-will. To persuade yourself of this, go down even to the depths of the abyss, and there I will bring you one of those wretched damned souls burning in hell, so that he may explain this truth to you. Here is one now: *"Tell me, who are you?" "I am a poor idolater, born in an unknown land; I never heard of heaven or hell, nor of what I am suffering now." "Poor wretch! Go away, you are not the one I am looking for." Another one is coming; there he is. "Who are you?" "I am a schismatic from the ends of Tartary; I always lived in an uncivilized state, barely knowing that there is a God." "You are not the one I want; return to hell." Here is another. "And who are you?" "I am a poor heretic from the North. I was born under the Pole and never saw either the light of the sun or the light of faith." "It is not you that I am looking for either, return to Hell." Brothers, my heart is broken upon seeing these wretches who never even knew the True Faith among the damned. Even so, know that the sentence of condemnation was pronounced against them and they were told, *"Thy damnation comes from thee."* They were damned because they wanted to be. They received so many aids from God to be saved! We do not know what they were, but they know them well, and now they cry out, *"O Lord, Thou art just... and**

Thy judgments are equitable."

Brothers, you must know that **the most ancient belief is the Law of God**, and that **we all bear it written in our hearts**; that **it can be learned without any teacher**, and that **it suffices to have the light of reason in order to know all the precepts of that Law**. That is why even the barbarians hid when they committed sin, because they knew they were doing wrong; and they are damned for not having observed the natural law written in their heart: for had they observed it, God would have made a miracle rather than let them be damned; He would have sent them someone to teach them and would have given them other aids, of which they made themselves unworthy by not living in conformity with the inspirations of their own conscience, which never failed to warn them of the good they should do and the evil they should avoid. So it is their conscience that accused them at the Tribunal of God, and it tells them constantly in hell, "*Thy damnation comes from thee.*" They do not know what to answer and are obliged to confess that they are deserving of their fate. Now if these infidels have no excuse, will there be any for a Catholic who had so many sacraments, so many sermons, so many aids at his disposal? How will he dare to say, "*If God was going to damn me, then why did He create me?*" How will he dare to speak in this manner, when God gives him so many aids to be saved? So let us finish confounding him.

You who are suffering in the abyss, answer me! Are there any Catholics among you? "There certainly are!" How many? Let one of them come here! "That is impossible, they are too far down, and to have them come up would turn all of hell upside down; it would be easier to stop one of them as he is falling in." So then, **I am speaking to you who live in the habit of mortal sin, in hatred, in the mire of the vice of impurity, and who are getting closer to hell each day. Stop, and turn around; it is Jesus who calls you and who, with His wounds, as with so many eloquent voices, cries to you, "My son, if you are damned, you have only yourself to blame: 'Thy damnation comes from thee.'** Lift up your eyes and see all the graces with which I have enriched you to insure your eternal salvation. I could have had you born in a forest in Barbary; that is what I did to many others, but I had you born in the Catholic Faith; I had you raised by such a good father, such an excellent mother, with the purest instructions and teachings. If you are damned in spite of that, whose fault will it be? Your own, My son, your own: *'Thy damnation comes from thee.'*

"I could have cast you into hell after the first mortal sin you committed, without waiting for the second: I did it to so many others, but I was patient with you, I waited for you for many long years. I am still waiting for you today in penance. If you are damned in spite of all that, whose fault is it? Your own, My son, your own: "*Thy damnation comes from thee.*" You know how many have died before your very eyes and were damned: that was a warning for you. You know how many others I set back on the right path to give you the good example. Do you remember what that excellent confessor told you? I am the one who had him say it. Did he not enjoin you to change your life, to make a good confession? I am the One who inspired him. Remember that sermon that touched your heart? I am the One who led you there. And what has happened between you and Me in the secret of your heart, ...*that* you can never forget.

"Those interior inspirations, that clear knowledge, that constant remorse of conscience, would you dare to deny them? All of these were so many aids of My grace, because I wanted to save you. I refused to give them to many others, and I gave them to you because I loved you tenderly. My son, My son, if I spoke to them as

tenderly as I am speaking to you today, how many others souls return to the right path! And you... you turn your back on Me. Listen to what I am going to tell you, for these are My last words: You have cost Me My blood; if you want to be damned in spite of the blood I shed for you, do not blame Me, you have only yourself to accuse; and throughout all eternity, do not forget that if you are damned in spite of Me, you are damned because you want to be damned: *'Thy damnation comes from thee.'* "

O my good Jesus, the very stones would split on hearing such sweet words, such tender expressions. Is there anyone here who wants to be damned, with so many graces and aids? If there is one, let him listen to me, and then let him resist if he can.

Baronius relates that after Julian the Apostate's infamous apostasy, he conceived such great hatred against Holy Baptism that day and night, he sought a way in which he might erase his own. To that purpose he had a bath of goat's blood prepared and placed himself in it, wanting this impure blood of a victim consecrated to Venus to erase the sacred character of Baptism from his soul. Such behavior seems abominable to you, but if Julian's plan had been able to succeed, it is certain that he would be suffering much less in hell.

Sinners, the advice I want to give you will no doubt seem strange to you; but if you understand it well, it is, on the contrary, inspired by tender compassion toward you. I implore you on my knees, by the blood of Christ and by the Heart of Mary, change your life, come back to the road that leads to heaven, and do all you can to belong to the little number of those who are saved. If, instead of this, you want to continue walking on the road that leads to hell, at least find a way to erase your baptism. Woe to you if you take the Holy Name of Jesus Christ and the sacred character of the Christian engraved upon your soul into hell! Your chastisement will be all the greater. So do what I advise you to do: if you do not want to convert, go this very day and ask your pastor to erase your name from the baptismal register, so that there may not remain any remembrance of your ever having been a Christian; implore your Guardian Angel to erase from his book of graces the inspirations and aids he has given you on orders from God, for woe to you if he recalls them! Tell Our Lord to take back His faith, His baptism, His sacraments.

You are horror-struck at such a thought? Well then, cast yourself at the feet of Jesus Christ and say to Him, with tearful eyes and contrite heart: "**Lord, I confess that up till now I have not lived as a Christian. I am not worthy to be numbered among Your elect. I recognize that I deserve to be damned; but Your mercy is great and, full of confidence in Your grace, I say to You that I want to save my soul, even if I have to sacrifice my fortune, my honor, my very life, as long as I am saved. If I have been unfaithful up to now, I repent, I deplore, I detest my infidelity, I ask You humbly to forgive me for it. Forgive me, good Jesus, and strengthen me also, that I may be saved. I ask You not for wealth, honor or prosperity; I ask you for one thing only, to save my soul.**"

And You, O Jesus! What do You say? O Good Shepherd, see the stray sheep who returns to You; embrace this repentant sinner, bless his sighs and tears, or rather bless these people who are so well disposed and who want nothing but their salvation. Brothers, at the feet of Our Lord, let us protest that we want to save our soul, cost what it may. Let us all say to Him with tearful eyes, "Good Jesus, I want to save my soul," O blessed tears, O blessed sighs!

Conclusion

Brothers, I want to send all of you away comforted today. So if you ask me my sentiment on the number of those who are saved, here it is: Whether there are many or few that are saved, I say that whoever wants to be saved, will be saved; and that no one can be damned if he does not want to be. And if it is true that few are saved, it is because there are few who live well. As for the rest, compare these two opinions: the first one states that the greater number of Catholics are condemned; the second one, on the contrary, pretends that the greater number of Catholics are saved. Imagine an Angel sent by God to confirm the first opinion, coming to tell you that not only are most Catholics damned, but that of all this assembly present here, one alone will be saved. If you obey the Commandments of God, if you detest the corruption of this world, if you embrace the Cross of Jesus Christ in a spirit of penance, you will be that one alone who is saved.

Now imagine the same Angel returning to you and confirming the second opinion. He tells you that not only are the greater portion of Catholics saved, but that out of all this gathering, one alone will be damned and all the others saved. If after that, you continue your usuries, your vengeance, your criminal deeds, your impurities, then you will be that one alone who is damned.

What is the use of knowing whether few or many are saved? Saint Peter says to us, "*Strive by good works to make your election sure.*" When Saint Thomas Aquinas's sister asked him what she must do to go to heaven, he said, "*You will be saved if you want to be.*" I say the same thing to you, and here is proof of my declaration. No one is damned unless he commits mortal sin: that is of faith. And no one commits mortal sin unless he wants to: that is an undeniable theological proposition. Therefore, no one goes to hell unless he wants to; the consequence is obvious. Does that not suffice to comfort you? Weep over past sins, make a good confession, sin no more in the future, and you will all be saved. Why torment yourself so? For it is certain that you have to commit mortal sin to go to hell, and that to commit mortal sin you must want to, and that consequently no one goes to hell unless he wants to. That is not just an opinion, it is an undeniable and very comforting truth; may God give you to understand it, and may He bless you. Amen.

In the first Rules on the discernment of spirits, Saint Ignatius shows that it is typical of the evil spirit to tranquilize sinners. Therefore, we must constantly preach and give rise to confidence and the duty of hope in the Lord's infinite pardon and mercy, for conversion is easy and His grace is all-powerful. But we must also recall that "God is not mocked," and that someone who is living habitually in the state of mortal sin is on the road to eternal damnation.

There are last-minute miracles, but unless we contend that miracles are the general run of things, we are obliged to agree that for the majority of people living in the state of mortal sin, final impenitence is the most probable eventuality.

Saint Leonard of Port Maurice's reasons have persuaded us. They are worth listening to. With eloquence and clarity, they develop a consideration of Father Lombardi in his public debate with Italian Communist leader Velio Spano in Cagliari on December 4, 1948. "I am horror-struck at the thought that if you continue in this manner, you will be condemned to hell," said Father Lombardi to the Marxist Spano. Spano replied, "I do not believe in hell." And Father Lombardi retorted, "Precisely, and if you continue,

you will be condemned; for to avoid being condemned, one must believe in hell."

We could generalize Father Lombardi's answer. Perhaps it is precisely such a lack of supernatural faith that is preventing people from arriving at a deep appreciation of the pastoral transcendence of preaching in the manner of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice in its application to our contemporary life. At any rate, it is not because morals are any better now than in the famous missionary's day. No occasion could be finer for us to apply this reproach of Cardinal Pie: "I see prudence everywhere; soon we will not see courage anywhere; rest assured, if we continue in this manner, we will die from an attack of wisdom." Not divine wisdom, surely; for only carnal and worldly prudence give rise to vain knowledge, which mocks at the sermon of Saint Leonard.

The doctrine of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice has saved and will save countless souls till the end of time. Here is what the Church says in the prayer of the Divine Office, Sixth Lesson, speaking of Saint Leonard's heavenly eloquence: *Upon hearing him, even hearts of iron and brass were powerfully inclined to penance, by reason of the astonishing effectiveness of the sermon and the preacher's burning zeal.* And in the liturgical prayer we ask of the Lord, *Give the power to bend the hearts of hardened sinners by the works of preaching.*

This sermon by Saint Leonard of Port Maurice was preached during the reign of Pope Benedict XIV, who so loved the great missionary.