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Promises of God vs. the promises of the World

Thomas a Kempis (The Imitation of Christ)



The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis is undoubtedly the greatest spiritual classic of western Christianity from the 14th Century. This excerpt (Lib. 3.3) treats of the difference between the world's empty promises and the promises of God. It is used in the Roman Catholic Office of Readings for Monday of the 22nd week in Ordinary Time with the accompanying biblical reading taken from Jeremiah 19:1-20:6.

My son, says the Lord, listen to my words, the most delightful of all words, surpassing all the knowledge of the philosophers and wise men of this world. My words are spirit and life and cannot be comprehended by human senses alone.

They are not to be interpreted according to the vain pleasure of the listener, but they must be listened to in silence and received with all humility and great affection.

And I said: Blessed is the man whom you teach, Lord, and whom you instruct in your law; for him you soften the blow of the evil day, and you do not desert him on the earth.

The Lord says, I have instructed my prophets from the beginning. Even to the present time I have not stopped speaking to all men, but many are deaf and obstinate in response.

Many hear the world more easily than they hear God; they follow the desires of the flesh more readily than the pleasure of God. The world promises rewards that are temporal and insignificant, and these are pursued with great longing; I promise rewards that are eternal and unsurpassable, yet the hearts of mortals respond sluggishly.

Who serves and obeys me in all matters with as much care as the world and its princes are served?

Blush, then, you lazy, complaining servant, for men are better prepared for the works of death than you are for the works of life. They take more joy in vanity than you in truth.

Yet they are often deceived in their hope, while my promise deceives no one, and leaves empty-handed no one who confides in me. What I have promised I shall give; what I have said I will fulfil

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for any man who remains faithful in my love unto the very end. I am the rewarder of all good men, the one who rigorously tests the devoted.

Write my words in your heart and study them diligently, for they will be absolutely necessary in the time of temptation. Whatever you fail to understand in reading my words will become clear to you on the day of your visitation.

I visit my elect in a double fashion, that is, with temptation and with consolation. And I read to them two lessons each day: one to rebuke them for their faults; the other to exhort them to increase their virtue.

He who possesses my words yet spurns them earns his own judgment on the last day.

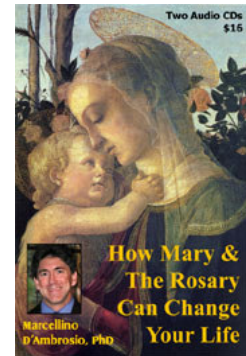
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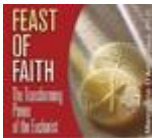
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