

FIVE-MINUTE SERMON.

First Sunday of Advent.

LOOKING TO THE END.

"And He spoke to them a simile, saying: 'See the fig tree and all the trees; when they now shoot forth their fruit you know that summer is nigh.'

That seems a strange simile for our Lord to make use of, does it not, my brethren? Yet what could more forcibly teach the lesson He would have us learn? Every one, even the simplest child, when he sees the trees beginning to put forth their leaves, knows that summer is nigh. So our Lord wished us to see that the signs preceding the end of the world are equally clear. And not only is this true of that great last day when all things shall be changed and the voice of the angel shall be heard calling all men to judgment; it is equally true of the day when the world shall end for us, when we shall be forced to leave the world. There are signs all around us telling that we are fast hurrying to the appointed lot of all men. Yet too often we live as if that day were still far off, as if we had yet many years to live; and when the day at last comes, how many does it not find unprepared?

What could be a clearer sign to us of the approach of death than this day, this first Sunday of Advent? For what is it? It is the beginning of a new year. It is the day on which the church begins over again her round of penance and prayer and joy. A year of our lives has gone from us, and how have we spent it? What have we done? How do we stand now in God's sight? Are we better than we were a year ago? Has it not been to us a year of warning? Look back and see how many of your friends and neighbors have fallen in the battle of life during this past year; and how unexpected, perhaps, was it to many of them! How many afflictions have come to you! They were all signs, and the one lesson they should have taught you was that the time of life was short and was rapidly drawing to a close. Did you ever stop to think of that? Did you ever ask yourselves why it was your friend or neighbor was taken away and you were spared? Ah! it was that you might hear again the words of warning spoken to us by our Lord Himself. 'Take heed to yourselves,' He says, 'lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day come upon you suddenly.' These words are not new to you. You have often heard them before, but what effect have they produced? Have you given up those sins of drunkenness and gluttony? Have you rid yourselves of those excessive and sinful cares of life? Or did you delude yourselves? Did you go forth from the church and say: 'Oh! I am young yet; I see no signs of death in me: there will be time enough to think of those things when I get older.' Thou fool! Have you not heard the words of the Gospel addressed to the man who thought he had a long time for enjoyment? And even while his heart was filled with such things the awful voice of God was heard saying: 'Thou fool, this night all these things shall be taken from thee, and thy soul cast into hell.' My brethren, ask yourselves now, what would be your fate if the voice were suddenly to call you. Do not some of you shudder when you think of it? And what is it then, as reasonable beings, that we ought to do? Is it to go on in that awful state? Ah! my brethren, God has permitted us to hear those words of warning perhaps for the last time, and sad indeed will it be for us if we do not heed them. And now is the time to prepare: now, at the very beginning of this new year, is the time to cast off the works of darkness, to free ourselves from the sins by which we have been so long enslaved, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

"WHICH THINGS ARE AN ALLEGORY."

Philip Fletcher in the London Universe.

This year of grace 1908 will be a wonderful year in the history of the Catholic Church in England. It has seen the lifting up of England by Pope Pius X. to a stage higher than that of a merely missionary country. I do not venture to say, without consulting authorities, which I cannot do at this moment, that England's place in Christendom is just yet, exactly where it was before the Reformation, or where faithful Catholic countries have been since. But it is emerging from and rising higher than that lower place into which the fatal sixteenth century thrust it. On this account the year of grace is memorable for us who are Catholics of England.

Again, as even secular journals have pointed out, it is a memorable thing that in this year a Legate a latere comes to England. It is, if I remember rightly, exactly three hundred and fifty years since the last Legate a latere died. He has had no successor through all that long period. From Cardinal Pole to Cardinal Yarnham is a stretch of three centuries and a half. It is bridged over at last. Pius IV. stands at the farther end of the bridge, Pius X. at this end. And across it comes at length the Legate a latere, the successor of Cardinal Pole. Therefore this year of grace 1908 is a memorable year for the Catholics of England.

"My lord will be here in a week, I hope," said the Queen. (Thus Father Benson in "The Queen's Tragedy.") "He has been knocking long at the door of England," said Peter at Rhoda's wicket," said the Bishop, smiling. "Yes," he said; it is Peter who comes, not Pole."

Let us recall that knocking at Rhoda's gate.

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"Peter therefore was kept in prison. But prayer was made without ceasing by the Church unto God for him."

"Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison."

"And behold an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shined in the room; and he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: 'Arise quickly.' And the chain fell off from his hands."

"And the angel said to him: 'Gird thyself and put on thy sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him: 'Cast thy garments about thee and follow me.'

"And going out, he followed him, and he knew not that it was true, which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision."

"And passing through the first and second ward, they came to the iron gate that leadeth to the city, which of itself opened to them."

"And going out, they passed on through one street, and immediately the angel departed from him."

"And Peter, coming to himself, said: 'Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hands of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.'

"And considering, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of the Church, who was surnamed Mark, where many were gathered together in prayer."

"And when he knocked at the door of the gate a damsel came to hearken whose name was Rhoda."

"And as soon as she knew Peter's voice she opened not the gate for joy, but running in she told that Peter stood before the gate."

"But they said to her: 'Thou art mad.' But she affirmed that it was so. Then said they: 'It is his angel.'

"But Peter continued knocking. And when they had opened they saw him and were astonished."

Which things are an allegory. Things which happened in Jerusalem, when Christianity began became an allegory of things happening in London this month. But the allegory begins its tale in 1535 and goes on till now.

Herod the King stretched forth his hands to afflict some of the Church. Change the last letters of Herod's name and you will find yourself in 1535.

"And seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take up Peter also." Change the Jews into Anne Boleyn and the Reformers, and you find Peter imprisoned, bound, fettered, rendered helpless in England; bound with two chains, the Royal Supremacy and the Penal Laws, which took his liberty away.

But we have seen the light shine into the prison: we have heard the clang of the chains as they have fallen off from his hands. Yes, we have seen Peter gird himself and put on his sandals, ready to walk once more in the streets of the city. He has cast his garments about him; he has clothed himself with the hierarchy, the robe which becomes him where liberty is his. There was one on that memorable day when Peter once more vested himself in England with the robe of the hierarchy, one of whom it might be said, as was said of Peter passing from the prison of Jerusalem. "He thought he saw a vision." Read again, dear reader, the "Second Spring" of John Henry Newman at St. Mary's, Oscott, and let the wonderful and beautiful vision pass before you as it did before his entranced hearers on that day in 1850.

Peter has passed through the first and second wards and the iron gate of those centuries which kept him prisoner in England. And he comes to the house of Mary. In our allegory Mary, the mother of John Mark, becomes Mary, the Mother of God, whose dowry England was and is: England, Mary's dowry house. Peter knocked at the door. Rhoda, peeping through the grille, thinks it is Peter's angel. And so many think of the Legate a latere simply as the angel or messenger of the Pope.

But Queen Mary Tudor of England was right. "He has been knocking long at the door of England" (and if Mary thought it long, how much more we). "It is Peter who comes, not Pole."

And to us now, in the days which are closing upon us, it is Peter who comes to England. God be praised.

"And when they saw him they were astonished." There is the astonishment of joy, and this belongs to us, the Catholics of England. There is the astonishment of surprise, and this is ours, our non-Catholic neighbors; surprise that such things can be after the things which have been.

Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium: laqueus contritus est et nos liberati sumus. Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini: qui fecit cunctum et terram.

Peter, escaped from prison and knocks at the door of England.

OUR PARISH.

SOME PERTINENT OBSERVATIONS THAT MIGHT BE MADE BY ANY PARISHIONER.

On moving into a new parish lately and becoming acquainted I was surprised to note what a small percentage of the congregation can be counted upon for active assistance and cordial co-operation with the parish priest. The great majority are well disposed in a negative way, contribute to the collections and attend to their spiritual duties fairly well, but without much warmth or zeal.

Strange to say, there is a large number who "have something against the priest." Generally it is a trifling matter, but they have nursed it so long that it has assumed magnitude in their eyes. Then the amount of criticism of the pastor and his methods is a revelation. Some say he is too fond of money and others blame him for lavishness. Some aver that he is too familiar with the people and others call him "distant."

He has a bad temper or is irritatingly calm according to the company you keep.

I did not notice these things in the old parish. Time and familiarity had softened down the roughness of comment and criticism and I knew that some of

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the talkers did not matter and that others did not mean half what they said, but here it is different, and for the first time in my life I begin to realize what a difficult work is that of a pastor. Of course, much of this half-hearted service and readiness to criticize comes from a lack of knowledge of responsibility. Few of those who have so much to say about the priest give much thought to the priest's side of the question. They find it hard enough to keep their own households in order and yet never hesitate to find fault with the man who must look out for a family that runs up into the thousands.

The generality of pastors do not inform the people when they are sick, sore or sad, and yet, when we come to think of it, this must often be the case. In practice it is the clerical hypochondria who receives the sympathy that should go to the men who suffer and are silent.

There is the genuine ring of the true parishioner in the statement of the century in the gospel who asked the Lord to heal his son. He was a man of respectability and understood the worth of instant and willing obedience. And Christ was quick to approve of that loyal stand with the words: "I have not found such faith in all Israel." This is generally the case. The people of the congregation who have much to attend to are the most helpful and most charitable to the priest, while those who are shiftless and careless have the most to say.

Doubtless the Church has had the grumblers, like the poor, with her from the beginning. In all likelihood there were individuals in old Rome and Corinth who found St. Peter too impetuous and St. Paul too plain spoken. Some people would be lonely without some sort of a grievance against the priest.—Looker-On in Boston Pilot.

GOD'S GRACE.

"It is expedient for you that I go, for if I go not the Paraclete will not come to you, but if I go I will send Him to you."

These words, spoken by our Divine Lord to His sorrowing apostles, might before He died were the introduction to them and to all of the Holy Ghost in the work of the redemption and regeneration of mankind. Hitherto the Father and the Son alone are spoken of, but the third person of the Blessed Trinity must also appear as one with them, and as He proceeds from the Father and the Son, the living link of their mutual love, so through the Holy Ghost we have the progression and consummation of the Father's will and the Son's fulfillment of it, in their effects the gifts of the Holy Spirit "best gift of God to men."

Lord is the new perfect gift coming down from the Father of Lights is bestowed upon us."

As in creation, still more in the redemption and regeneration of man, we are to become more and more after the image of the Creator. As Christ our Lord is the new perfect gift coming down from the Father of Lights is bestowed upon us."

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him, we can do all things in Him Who strengthens us."

But we must take the initiative; yield of ourselves to God's grace, constantly striving for a place in our hearts. God will not do violence to our wills; it is for us to conquer them with His aid. He will suggest, entreat, yes, goad us into better lives, but we shall be masters still and until we shall move, nothing can be accomplished for our salvation. God is always ready and doing what He can to save us without infringing on the liberty of our wills, but we oppose Him and frustrate His designs by our perverse and sinful deeds.

O let us hearken, then to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Our salvation will turn upon some one of them; those words that come to us from the voice of His ministers, that gnawing conscience within us that will not be still; those trials that visit us sooner or later in life, those hauntings of the dead that follow us, go where we will; those dreams of heaven and loved ones there—the mother's smile, the father's face, the father's bidding word—for in these and a thousand other ways does the Holy Ghost try to turn back our hearts to God, to live no longer in the flesh, but in the spirit "new creatures," sons of God and joint heirs in the kingdom of heaven.

It is through prayer well said and the sacraments worthily received that grace comes readily to our souls. Hence Our Divine Lord exhorted us to pray, and pray always, and experience proves to us the need of so doing, and Our Lord assures us that we have but to ask to receive. If we did not avail ourselves of this most necessary to us, His grace, and which we can have in abundance just for the asking.

We must also have recourse to the sacraments, for they are the chief channels of God's grace. It is in holy communion we shall find our greatest help, for, speaking of this, Our Lord said: "He who partakes of My body and drinks of My blood, the Father and I will make our abode in his soul, and we shall raise him up at the last day."

God give us the grace to be ever faithful to grace!—Bishop Colton in Buffalo Catholic Union and Times.

hundred thousand annual converts.

EUROPE ASTONISHED AT NUMBER WHO EMBRACE THE FAITH IN THE UNITED STATES EVERY YEAR.

The number of converts to the Catholic Church in the United States is engaging the attention of our brethren in Europe, says the Messenger of New York. The figures published in connection with reports of the missions preached in our churches seem great to those who do not keep in mind the relative value of statistics. Fifteen thousand, the estimated yearly number of converts in England, is very large in proportion to twenty-five thousand for the United States, since the Catholics of England are only one-fifth of our number, and the only one-eighth of the whole number of inhabitants, whereas we are about one-sixth of our total population.

Careful and repeated inquiry about the number of converts to the Church in this country has convinced us that three or four times 25,000 are received every year. Unfortunately, every estimate must be regarded more or less as guess-work so long as we have no reliable or certified statistics. Very few of the religious orders or of the secular clergy engaged in giving missions keep records of the converts made, and even the one which reports them most carefully does not always distinguish between those who are received on account as well as on the occasion, of the missions, and those who have been kept waiting by pastors for the instructions which are usually given to converts during the missions. Only 16 of the dioceses report the number of converts, 1,000 all, but these are not by any means the largest dioceses, nor those in which conversions are the most numerous.

A province of one religious order in which about 100 men have been engaged in the sacred ministry has averaged 1,000 converts for the last twenty-five years. At this rate every 1,000 priests would receive about 10,000 converts, and the whole number of priests actually engaged in the ministry would receive at least 100,000 yearly. This figure may appear very large; but it is very small when one takes into account the number of priests, and the number of religious, of women particularly, who lead inquirers into the Church; and it is small also in comparison to the number of Catholics and to the vast number of Catholics who have come into the

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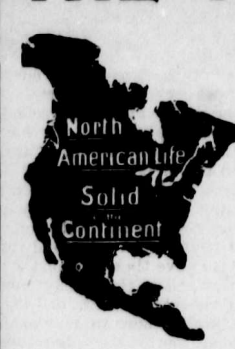
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Church under such auspices, as contrasted with the number due chiefly or solely to missions in our churches, and there would be additional interest in knowing what proportion of each set of converts remains faithful.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

When people lose confidence in God they are guilty of the sin that is not forgiven in this world or the next. St. Thomas says that charity is the principle of merit, but confidence is the principle of imputation. We must learn to have confidence in God; to hope even against hope. Abraham was promised a long line of descendants through his son Isaac. Yet at the command of God he was ready to sacrifice him; hoping, as St. Paul says, against hope.

After an act of love there is nothing that so honors God as an act of hope. The favors of God are always a gauge of further favors. He gives because He loves. He says by the Psalmist: "Thou wilt call on Me in thy tribulation. I will rescue thee, and thou shalt honor Me."

When He was about to scourge the people of Israel, Moses recalled to his mind the many and wondrous benefits He had conferred them.

One would think this a poor way of appealing the Divine wrath. It would appear the surest way of arousing God's further resentment. But Moses knew better. His argument prevailed, and the people were saved. What causes hope to die in the heart is the overwhelming sense of guilt. People must be taught that sin is rather an inducement to hope.

ment to hope. The man who approaches God with confidence in his own goodness, insults the Divine Majesty, like the Pharisee in the Gospel.

We have no merit we can justly call our own, and we owe all the good we possess to the sheer mercy of God. Sin is no obstacle to hope, no bar to confidence. The greater the sinner, the stronger should be his hope, for God does not want his death. We should not late or condemn our brother because he is a sinner. The despair of the few is the contempt of the many. We must love sinners, and we must teach them to hope.

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