

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

By Rev. F. P. Hickey, O. S. B.

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CORPUS CHRISTI

EXCUSES FROM FREQUENT COMMUNION

"And they began all at once to make excuses." (Luke xiv, 18.)

The Gospel and the Festival are well in unison to-day. Corpus Christi, my dear brethren, must of necessity lose much of its grandeur and solemnity in a non-Catholic country, where churches and congregations for the most part are small and the clergy but few. But to us, at least, is left that which is essential to the solemnity. What would all the outward show be worth—the pomp, the processions, the crowded cathedrals, the reverent crowds of worshippers—if the hearts of men were not united to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? The hour our Blessed Lord loves most is that early, quiet hour when the silent throng gathers round the altar-rails. What would the Festival of Corpus Christi be if there were no Communions? We can all make a festival for our Lord in our hearts if we choose.

Yet the point of the Gospel is the excuses that they all began to make, and the insistence of the Master that other guests should be found. "And they began all at once to make excuses." This is the truth, that it will be the work of the ministers of the Church till the end of time to compel them to come in, we can make no doubt, for the God of Truth spoke the parable.

Men still love the things of earth more than those of heaven. What they see and can grasp and enjoy has a hold on them, but the things of faith are swept aside.

Pride makes the first excuse. Too taken up with things of their own—their possessions, their homes—they have not time for God. They neglect either to obey or serve Him, and when reminded by the invitation willfully disobey the summons, and hypocritically pray to be excused. And avarice follows the example of pride. It wants to see that it has got the value of its money: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them." This short life engrosses all their interests, and they take no heed that there is an eternal life to come. The rich man when he shall sleep shall take away nothing with him; he shall open his eyes and find nothing." (Job xxvii, 19.) "The desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows." (1 Tim. vi, 10.)

And luxury, the enthrallment of carnal pleasures, takes such possessions of a man that he has not the manners to say, "Pray hold me excused," but bluntly, "I cannot come." For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life. (1 John ii, 16, 17.)

Can no better excuses be found why men abstain from Holy Communion than such as these—that pride, avarice, sensuality, are masters of their soul, which disowns allegiance to Jesus Christ? Those who approach Holy Communion but seldom, may feel offended at this. Here is the bread that keeps them away is spoken of thus. Each one tries to persuade himself that he indeed has very good reason for us so seldom receiving the Blessed Eucharist. The usual one is the plea of unworthiness. It is true; it sounds well; but it is a mere pretext and a sham.

Test it. What do you do to become less unworthy? Delay will help you nothing. Remaining in a tepid, sluggish state cannot improve you. Here is the Bread of Life, and your soul is starving! Does not common sense force you to remember the words of our Blessed Lord: "This is the Bread which cometh down from heaven, that if any man eat of it he may not die." (John vi, 50, 52.)

What else can give you spiritual life and strength as well as this Bread of Life? And did not He Who instituted the Blessed Eucharist well know our unworthiness, and has He left no means with His Church to do away with our unworthiness? The Sacrament of Penance will wash away the sins which indeed make us unworthy to partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord. Even then, indeed, what are we? Let us own it—we are amongst "the poor and the lame;" but remember the Lord has those brought into His supper, and welcomed them. If we are waiting to be brought in as honoured guests, we are making a great mistake; we are not indeed worthy of that.

What we must do is, having carefully repented of our sins, to own our unworthiness and forthwith approach the Lord in obedience, confidence, faith, and love—obedience, because the invitation is a summons, and no excuse will be accepted; confidence, because a precept of the Church emphasises the wish of the Lord, and the command is laid on sinners; faith, because we know the Holy Eucharist continues and carries on the work of the Incarnation, and Christ came "to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke xix, 10.) And love! How can we help but love when we reflect Who it is that we receive in Holy Communion; how it is that we receive Him under the appearance of bread; why it is we receive Him, that He may feed and

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nourish our souls, that we may live by Him? What a union! Need we speak of love? The great God gives Himself to the poorest and the worst of sinners.

Where, then, is this excuse of unworthiness? It is swept away by faith and confidence, obedience, and love. To stay away because unworthy, and to do nothing to become less unworthy, is an insult to God. But to approach Holy Communion in a true and humble Catholic spirit, confessing our unworthiness, but trusting that every Communion will lessen our unworthiness, is indeed giving glory to God and enriching our own souls with the choicest of blessings.

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

When the American people decided upon a complete severance with the mother country and rejected the right of British sovereignty to rule them without their consent, they stated their case in a masterpiece of English prose composed by Thomas Jefferson. They based their case on the principle that the general will of the people is supreme. "If sovereignty is not in the people, where is it?" asked the Jesuit Suarez.

The introductory paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence contain the quintessence of the present demands of the Irish people for freedom and are well worth quoting at the present moment:

"When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitled them, a decent respect for the opinion of mankind requires that they shall declare the causes that impels the separation.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of those ends it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

It is no longer possible for the British Government to assert successfully that the Irish demand for self-determination is a "domestic" question. That notion of sovereignty is as archaic as the old theory that the employer could do as he liked with his own and pay his employees starvation wages for twelve or fourteen hours' daily work.

The presence of several hundred thousand armed British soldiers in Ireland equipped with tanks and bombing aeroplanes cannot fight against the ultimate test of sovereignty in the consent of the governed. There is an historical parallel between the Irish Provisional Government or Dail Eirann and the American Continental Congress in repudiating British sovereignty. They both claimed inalienable rights from God and not from the charters of kings. The American, as well as the Irish Declaration, appeals to God to judge the righteousness of their

cause. Jefferson spoke for all subjects when he wrote in 1776:

"We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions, do in the name of and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare that these United Colonies are and of right ought to be Free and Independent States."

In a special cable dispatch sent to the S. F. Examiner, ex-Governor Dunne of Illinois, one of the three American delegates promoting the cause of Ireland at the Peace Conference, sums up the present situation in the following words:

"We are waiting momentarily a reply from President Wilson to our request for the use of the good offices of the United States Government in bringing the chosen representatives of the Irish people to Paris to present their country's case to the Peace Congress. If the President's reply is in the affirmative the first object of our mission to Paris will have been accomplished. If the Irish representatives come to Paris we will confer with them as to what our assistance we may give them in attaining independence for Ireland. Our visit to Ireland has surpassed all our expectations as regards the unanimity and determination of the Irish people in their struggle for freedom and independence. Prior to our departure for Dublin, Wilson accorded our chairman, Frank P. Walsh, a most gracious interview, and the commissioners had all been accorded a courteous audience by Colonel House. We are satisfied from our intercourse with people of all nationalities on our way over and here in Paris, that we have the sympathy of men and women of all classes and races."—The Monitor.

SUPERORDINATION

A proposal, emanating from Episcopal sources, seems to destroy what was essentially considered to be the sacrament of orders. According to the suggestion of those who are so keen to bring about a reunited Christendom a minister of any communion might apply for ordination to the Episcopal church and when the ceremony was conceded the applicant, while not losing his status in his own denomination, would be entitled to preach, and presumably to administer rites to Episcopal congregations. This superordination is only a suggestive stage and must be passed upon by the General Conventions of the Episcopal Church.

While it is expected that the plan will not receive much encouragement there is a significant sign of Protestant attitude towards supernatural aspects of the Christian faith when any section of a communion could countenance a denial of what was supposed to be the very substance of religious convictions.

When the Holy Father declined to recognize the validity of Anglican ordination, divinity scholars, particularly in England, scored the Pontiff as an ignorant bigot, totally blind to all historical evidence. They could prove the validity of their orders no matter what the Pope might say. So there returns to mind the argument of Cardinal Newman where he refers to the validity of baptism when administered by clergymen who themselves did not have the intention of baptising because they did not believe in the necessity of the sacrament. So now with orders. Possibly the Pope might have found some argument for his decision in the action of those today who believe so little in the supernatural character of the imposing of hands when one is to be admitted to the sanctuary that they are willing to have the ceremony a mere ticket of admission to promiscuous pulpits.—F. in The Guardian.

THE TREATY OF PEACE WITH GERMANY

Charles G. Fenwick, in the June Catholic World

Can it be said that the present Treaty is consistent with the principles of a just settlement as expressed in the various addresses of President Wilson which have been so generally quoted as the basis of a lasting peace? No one will contend that an ideal settlement has been reached. During the dark hours of the conflict states vowed their belief in abstract principles of justice which in the hour of triumph they are reluctant to apply to concrete facts. In some instances compromises have been made which puzzle the onlooker because he has not before him the facts upon which the Conference based its decision.

In other cases the compromises appear to threaten the very ideals for which the War was fought. But if we look not to the weak spots in the Treaty, but to its constructive provisions, if we compare it with the settlement effected at Vienna in 1815 or at Berlin in 1878, we cannot but feel that great progress has been made. The principle as a basis for the transfer of territory has been generally applied. New States are created to satisfy the desires of national groups, colonies are put under guardianship, commercial traffic in Europe is given greater freedom, and new international agencies have been created to superintend the administration of rights conferred.

Much has been done to secure a just peace, but much more remains to be done to secure

a permanent peace. A heavy weight has been laid upon Germany, which she cannot be expected to bear patiently if any hope of release is offered. The duress under which she is laid will not of itself give legal validity to the terms of peace. The experience of history shows that military securities have a way of proving elusive as years go by. The

only lasting security appears to lie in the new League of Nations which is made, as it were, the sponsor and guardian of the Treaty. Unless the League can be looked to for the amendment of those parts of the Treaty which may come to work injustice, and for such further readjustments of territory as the future may show to be necessary, unless it

can substitute common international rights for the rivalry of individual national claims and lay the basis of a cooperative commonwealth in place of a competitive armed camp, the present Treaty cannot survive a generation. With all its minor defects the League represents the passing of the old order of alliances and counter-alliances and of the unstable balance of power which grew out of them. The collective judg-

ment of the united nations offers hope for a just solution of the problems yet awaiting to be settled. What the world needs even more than due satisfaction for wrong done is wise provision for the maintenance of justice in the future. No treaty of peace with its security and reparation clauses can accomplish this; only the concerted action of nations continuously dominated by high ideals is adequate.

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