

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOR

"But I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." (Matt. v. 22.)

Among the commandments given us by God, that of loving Himself and our neighbor is the greatest. It is easy to fulfill the first part of this commandment, since God is so good and confers only favors upon us; but the second part is not so easy of fulfillment. Our neighbor is not always our brother in the pure sense of the word. A brother loves a brother, cares for him, and helps him willingly when needed. A neighbor does not always so act. He remains our neighbor, but it is often contrary to our feelings and persuasions to consider him a brother. It would seem that quite the opposite is true. However, God's law is that we consider every man our brother, as God considers every one His child. And as God's children are often rebellious and show Him no love, yet He does not deprive them of their relationship to Him, so when our neighbor acts in a manner unbecoming a brother, we should not, for that reason, alienate him. He is constituted our brother before God by very creation, and nothing can loosen the tie that binds us together.

But it may seem strange that God requires that we love our neighbor on all occasions, and even when he renders himself unworthy, that we treat him as a brother. If we become angry with him, we are placed thereby in danger of the judgment. It appears even more contrary to reason's dictates, when we take into consideration the fact that if our neighbor dies deprived of God's grace, he is banished from His sight forever. The heavenly Father can not fail to be angry, in a certain sense, with the obstinate sinner, and with him who constantly defies God even to the extent of denying His existence. It would seem impossible that His attitude toward such could be otherwise. We feel inclined to consider it contrary to the laws of justice, if God does not show anger toward a sinful, defiant man.

However, when we look into things from a lofty standpoint and judge according to higher justice than we know to exist among men, then we see that the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, God does not show His anger on earth. If He did, contemplate what would be the fate of many a prosperous sinner today. The blasphemer would not be standing on the platform uttering his threats, neither would the robber of the poor be enjoying the luxuries of his mansion and basking in the sunshine of his pleasure. The plumb line long ago would have swallowed up the defamer, the calumniator, the pedlar of wickedness in its worst forms. God still calls these sinners His sons and is treating them as such. They may be placed far from our class, far below us in virtue, absolutely bereft of all honor—yet they are our brothers, and God says we must ever consider and treat them as such. We are asked to do much less than God does Himself. The injuries to us are far less than His own. And we must imitate God in this as in other things.

But we can go further into this strange command, and see a reason for it. God wishes us to aim at perfection. Certainly it is more perfect to treat even the man as a brother than otherwise. It is also more according to reason that we should do so. We must realize that, if a punishment is to be meted out to the unjust, it is God who will render it to them. Should we at every turn wish to give man what may be due him at the moment, we would be like the ferocious beasts in order to satisfy their appetites, these animals leap upon man, tear him to pieces, and devour him. They also instinctively consider man their enemy, and make an effort to disable him so as to guard their own safety. When we pounce upon our enemies or upon sinners, we do it in order to satisfy a disordered spiritual appetite within us. When we try by unjust means to silence them or disable them, then to a great extent we are acting from selfish motives, and inflicting injuries upon people over whom we have no authority. Reason itself should guide us to act differently. Even though these unfortunate men might deserve the punishment we could inflict upon them, it is not our duty even to judge them, much less to punish them. As long as they live, they are our brothers, and as such we are bound to treat them.

But why, we may ask again, has God planned that our behavior toward all other men be as brothers toward brothers? He has done it, we may say, because this earth is a place in which man is to be purified. Justice is not to be done here. Were it to be, its course would have been started long ago. On earth every man is given sufficient chance to save his soul. He must be allowed this chance un molested, even though during a certain period or even during his whole life, he lives in sin. Why any man is a sinner for a time or always, we do not know. God alone sees the cause; and only He can fix the sinner's punishment and set the time for its infliction. Now, heaven will be the reward of the just, and in heaven

can be only the purest love of brother for brother. If we have not loved our brethren while on earth, even though in other respects our lives may have been just, we can not expect God to transform us. Love for our neighbor must occupy our whole heart, no matter if our neighbor be unworthy of it. If God finds him unworthy, then he will suffer, not we; and we will not have our neighbor before our eyes forever. He will be placed far from us, so that we may love and be loved by others who are like ourselves. This will happen when God will render to every man according to his works, which will be not now, but on the judgment day. So our duty is to render our hearts so that they will love all, and fit them to be loved by all who are rightly disposed. Some will not love us. It is particularly regarding these that God warns us. We must be careful lest we be angry with this class among our brothers, especially.

The second part of this commandment is difficult because it is opposed to our feelings, and because of the repulsiveness of him who makes himself our enemy, with no blame on our side. However, because it is difficult, it has great power to perfect us if we observe it. Our disordered nature, of which our hearts are a part, needs this discipline. We do not condone evil by loving our neighbor who commits it, more than does God when He allows a man to live on in sin. We must learn not to consider another's demerits, but to pay attention to the merits that we should on all occasions and at all times gain for ourselves. To beautify our souls should be our principal aim. This is done by elevating ourselves above everything lowly—in a word, to love what God loves and commands us to love, no matter how many reasons may appear to persuade us to the contrary.

UNCHRISTIAN TACTICS

A captious critic of things Catholic, who for present purposes shall be nameless, is reported to have taken the Church to task for her treatment of the Catholics of Mexico. If he was correctly quoted in the papers, he was guilty of making the same amazing and ridiculous error that has been a thousand times approved and a million times rejected by thinking men. For according to printed reports he virtually accused the Catholic Church of keeping people in ignorance. His charge is that the priests in Mexico are keeping the Bible from the common people, with the result that in his overdrawn statement, a "Bibleless cross" is pressing that people into superstition and darkness, and that "civilization has declined and disappeared right under the shadow of the vast church that lifts the Cross high against the sky."

This smacks very much of an attempt to resurrect the exploded calumnies about the so-called "Dark Ages" and apply them to Mexico. Poor Mexico has had her troubles. Religious persecution and confiscation of Church property have made her a distressed country. Late news from Mexico is anything but encouraging. Propagandists and proselytizers are spreading reports that the "Church" is being protected and encouraged. But by the "Church" they do not mean the Church of the Mexican people but the non-Catholic missions, which have entered Mexico to rob Catholic peons of their faith.

They must have some excuse to offer for their present activity, hence this absurd charge from one returned proselytizer that the Catholic Church is keeping the Mexicans in darkness. The Catholic Church never kept any people in darkness, never prohibited the reading of the Bible, never retarded the progress of civilization. Instead the Catholic Church has been the enlightener of nations, has encouraged the reading of the Bible, and has been the greatest civilizing force that the world has ever known.

The Church, which this critic condemns in Mexico, is the same Church which Gladstone, non-Catholic though he was, was fair enough to admit, "has marched for fifteen hundred years at the head of the world, and has driven harnessed to its chariot, as the horses of a triumphal car, the chief intellectual and material forces of the world. Its learning has been the learning of the world, its art the art of the world, its genius the genius of the world, its greatness, glory, grandeur, and majesty have been almost all in these respects the world has had to boast of."

The French historian Guizot, another non-Catholic observer, who wrote the History of Civilization, was not afraid to admit that the influence of the Catholic Church "on modern civilization has been immense, greater perhaps than has ever been imagined by her most ardent adversaries or her most zealous advocates." And yet we are told that "civilization has declined and disappeared under the very shadow of that Church" in Mexico. Are we to believe the reasoned testimony of historians who cannot be accused of being partial to the Catholic Church, since they are not of her communion, or shall we accept the rash unthinking utterance of one who comes from Mexico maligning that Church for his own personal ends?

In all fairness let non-Catholic apologists refrain from misrepresenting conditions, exaggerating facts, and calumniating their rivals. Especially in regard to Mexico, let them look at things as they are. If they will read the history of that country, they will learn of the work the Catholic Church has done in civilizing and educating a whole nation. The early missionaries in Mexico did not civilize the natives by exterminating them. They instructed them, civilized them, and converted them to the ancient faith, which they have ever held to tenaciously. The great Churches and ecclesiastical institutions throughout the country attest the undying vigor of that faith today in the hearts of the Mexican people.

There are evils in Mexico today, but they are not of the Church's making. Such ill advised attacks on the faith of the Mexican people will do nothing to cure them. But perhaps it will open the eyes of many in this country to the unfair tactics resorted to by some over-zealous proselytizers to advance their cause, tactics that are un-Christian as they are un-American.—The Pilot.

THE REAL PRESENCE IN OUR CHURCHES

That at the real, living, breathing influence of the Divine Presence is strongly felt by those not of the Faith, is given abundant proof in the following examples, and thousands of other examples, which could be quoted from all over the world: The late Father Mason, a holy devout priest, was in former years a great Methodist preacher. Once, in a sermon before his congregation, he told how he was drawn to the Catholic faith. Every time he entered a Catholic Church or chapel, he was made to feel that mysterious something that filled him with deep emotion and respect, nor did he know the reason therefor. Something impelled him to kneel with quiet and respectful demeanor, while he tried to imagine why it was that he never experienced any such emotions in his own church. Soon, however, he learned of the Catholic teaching regarding the Real Presence, and then and there he was convinced that the sentiments while in churches of that faith, were inspired by the actual presence of God. Therefore he embraced the Catholic Faith.

HOW A BARONESS WAS CONVERTED

The Baroness K., well known for her great talents, piety, and extensive and valuable writings, was a Protestant, very strongly prejudiced against the Catholic Faith. During a visit to Rome, she entered a Catholic church, where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed all day for the veneration of the faithful. She saw a multitude of people quietly kneeling, with eyes devoutly fixed upon the monstrance, but could not understand what it was that so drew their attention. Many candles were burning upon the altar, and the Baroness wondered if the people were praying to them, which she thought very foolish indeed. However, against her will, it seemed, she was impelled to kneel and pray, she hardly knew to what or whom. Thereafter, as if some unseen power drove her on, she was drawn to visit the church again and again, without being able to understand this mysterious influence. Not until a year had elapsed, did she learn whom the people in the church adored and prayed to. Then she went to a priest and told him her story, shedding tears at the thought of the whole year wasted, during which she might have been enjoying the fruits of the Blessed Sacrament, had she known of it.

She was received into the Catholic faith, and from a worldly-minded woman, she was changed into a devout servant of God. When in church, if she could not communicate herself, she strove to kneel near someone who had received the Divine Bread, feeling great joy and sweetness in her soul that she was permitted to be so near Him.—(Leo, No. 31, 1885.)

HOW THE BISHOP UNCONSCIOUSLY CONVERTED A WOMAN

Bishop Mermillod relates how, during his vicariate at Geneva, he unknowingly converted a Protestant lady by an act of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. It was his custom, each evening, to perform his devotions in the church, before the tabernacle; he also tended the sanctuary lamp, saw the doors were safely locked, and made sure that no one was hidden in the church, for it was a time when many robbers were abroad. Having attended to all these tasks, he would kneel upon the altar steps, and remain awhile with bowed head, deeply absorbed in prayer. Having finished, he would kiss the ground in token of deepest respect to the most Holy Sacrament, and then go home. One night as he was leaving the church, he heard a noise in the confessional, the door opened, and a well-dressed woman stepped out.

"What is your purpose here so late at night?" he asked.

"As you know, I am a Protestant," replied the lady. "I attended your Lenten sermons, wherein you spoke so convincingly of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Your vivid examples proved to me the truth of your words, but still—pardon my frankness—a certain doubtfulness remained. I wondered if you yourself believe the things you preach. I wanted to see for myself if you behave the same when alone before

the Blessed Sacrament, as before the people, so made a resolution, that if your actions coincided with your words, I would become a Catholic. So I came here tonight, hid in the confessional, and watched you. I believe. Please receive me into your Faith."

She became one of the most fervent Catholics of Geneva.—(Frzb. Kirchenbl. No. 18, 1879.)

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