

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. J. J. BURKE, PHOENIX, ILL. THE BIRTHDAY OF THE SAVIOUR

For this day is born to you a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. (Luke II, 11)

My dear friends, these words of joy were spoken by the angel of the shepherds near Bethlehem 1900 years ago.

As they filled the hearts of the Jewish shepherds with joy long ago, so to-day they fill the hearts of all with gladness, love, thanksgiving and reverence.

Every nation celebrates the anniversary of the most important events in its history. The 22nd of February and 4th of July will never be forgotten by the American people; for they are kept alive each succeeding year by a proud and grateful nation in honor of the birth of the Saviour of our country and also in honor of the birth of independence in America.

To-day we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Him Who was the Saviour, not of one particular portion of the earth, but of the whole world. What joy, then, should fill the hearts of all "For this day is born to you a Saviour."

If we cast a glance back, and consider what the world was 1900 years ago, before the coming of Christ, and then consider what it has been since among peoples guided by Christian principles, then we will have some idea of our motives for rejoicing to-day.

When Christ came, the majority of mankind was in slavery, without honor, without freedom, without hope. They were sunk into the lowest depths of immorality and crime. He taught them new doctrines concerning the duties of man to man, of the strong to the weak, of the rich to the poor, of man to woman.

He loved the mutual duty of love and charity. He sent those who loved Him to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive and to visit the sick.

He laid special stress upon the virtues of purity, meekness, humility, patience, faith and love. These doctrines of Christ were instrumental in securing the abolition of slavery, popular rights, free government, protection of children and the poor, in bringing knowledge within the reach of all and in spreading over the whole world institutions of charity.

Is it any wonder then that we rejoice to-day and feel that heaven is brought nearer to us? Angels are, no doubt, singing around us at this moment and assisting us to be more fervent in our acts of thanksgiving and praise.

For it is a day of universal joy and the angel's message has not been received in vain. But if it is a day of rejoicing for all, it seems to me to be in a special manner a day of rejoicing for the poor and afflicted. The poor seem to be the special favorites of Christ.

He was born in poverty. He, to Whom the whole world belonged, was born in a stable, destitute of the comforts of life. His parents were poor, and His first adherers on earth were poor, hardworking, mountain shepherds.

And afterwards, when He pointed out as one of the signs that He was the Messiah, He said: "The poor have the Gospel preached to them." And one of the characteristic marks of His Church seems to be that it is the Church of the poor. Is not to-day, then, in a special manner a day of rejoicing for the poor?

When we cast our eyes on that Divine Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying on a little bunch of straw in a stable on that cold December night, can we complain any more of our poor? Can we wretched lot? When we see that God-man suffering from cold and privation, can we refuse to suffer and bear our trials and our tribulations patiently for His sake? When we reflect on the humble and abject birth of the Son of God, shall we any longer have those proud thoughts because of our wealth, our clothing or our beauty? No. Let us practise those virtues especially taught by the Infant Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem.

Let us practise the Godlike virtues of humility, poverty and mortification, and try as much as possible to imitate Him who came on earth to show us the way to heaven.

He humbled Himself by becoming man. By humility He began and completed His victory over hell. He chose as His friends and apostles the humble. And He says to His followers, "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart."

You, a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

TEMPERANCE

THE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

It is something to be thankful for that in so many circles the old way of celebrating Christmas by drinking to excess has almost completely died out. Certainly, nothing could have been further from the true spirit of the Christmas season than the custom whereby men—and women too, alas—made themselves lower than the beasts of the field.

The sweetness and beauty of the day which commemorated the coming of Our Blessed Lord as a little Child, was lost and forgotten, drowned in a very ocean of drink.

To-day a better state of things prevails. A growing sense of decency has made drunkenness odious, and no longer is Christmas merriment made the excuse for beastly intemperance.

There still exists, however, more than a trace of the old spirit. The custom of offering intoxicating liquors to others in honor of the Christmas season, is still firmly established, though not so widespread as formerly, and many young men still are tempted to drink at Christmas by those who should be the last to offer them the intoxicating cup.

And although the custom of Christmas drinking has measurably declined among all classes, there has grown up another custom which surely leads to intemperance and other irregularities—the custom of taking Christmas dinner in hotels. This has a most pernicious effect on many people. It takes them away from the quiet, natural atmosphere of their own homes and leads them, among the artificialities of a public eating-house, to commit extravagances that they would not ordinarily dream of.

Christmas is a festival of the home and the family. It is a season of simple and true happiness. The Holy Family should be the model of the Catholic family at Christmastide, and while the Christmas spirit should express itself wherever possible in friendly gifts and kindly good wishes and good cheer, there is no excuse for emphasizing the eating and drinking feature of the holy day.

In the drinking, particularly, which so many people over do, the Catholic family should be a model of Christian restraint.

CHRISTMAS EVE—WAITING FOR PAPA

We have read many Christmas stories and seen many Christmas pictures, but none have impressed us more than a cartoon by the late Homer Davenport. It is captioned "Christmas Eve—Waiting for Papa," and depicts an emaciated, miserably-clad girl of tender years bearing in her arms a younger child of no less pitiable appearance, standing in a driving snow storm with eyes directed toward a toy-store and a saloon situated next to each other on the opposite side of the street.

The snow has drifted high against the front of the toy-store, and there are no foot-prints leading to the entrance; but a heavily trodden path leads to the door of the saloon. Beneath the picture runs this pathetic, trenchant legend: "Wouldn't it be jolly if Dad was in the toy-store?"

The drawn-up figure of a starving dog, accompanying the children, accentuates the destitution and privation of the group, and the intensity of the storm that is raging about them. It is "Christmas Eve," and the little ones are waiting for Papa.

"Wouldn't it be jolly if Dad was in the toy-store," says the one neglected child to the other. Can you imagine the picture? Do you sense the lesson?

We despair of telling in words all that the artist has shown and conveyed with his brush, but we trust our description of the picture has been clear enough to make the moral that we would add from it intelligible and effective.

Poverty is never more incisive than at Christmas tide; and there is no poverty and deprivation more keen and distressing than that which is precipitated on a home by an irresponsible and intemperate husband and father.

"Wouldn't it be jolly if Dad was in the toy-store?"—Yes, wouldn't it be jolly if he was in the grocery-store or butchershop; if he was spending his hard-earned money for fuel and clothing; wouldn't it be jolly if he was at home on Christmas Eve; wouldn't it be jolly if he was the man that he had once promised—and a wife in her early fondness had expected him—to be?

But, alas, he is in the saloon! To keep him from going there, to keep him from staying there, at least to the undoing of his home and its Christmas cheer is the purpose of Homer Davenport's cartoon. To call attention to it and its injunction is the object of this editorial.

THE PROTESTANT RULE OF FAITH

IS THE BIBLE ALONE SUFFICIENT?

By a Pious Father

A second principle by which we may estimate the worth of the theory that the Bible alone, interpreted by each man for himself, and not by an infallible Church, is the means provided by Christ for acquainting the world with His Gospel may be briefly stated thus: Christ provided a straight, safe, sure way of arriving at knowledge of His gospel. Those, therefore, that walk in His appointed way reach the goal of knowledge. They are not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine; they are not always seeking, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth; but in due season they come to know, definitely, clearly and with certainty what Christ has taught, and wants men to believe.

PRINCIPLE UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED

With this principle, on grounds of reasoning, those who call themselves Christians can hardly disagree. In fact they universally admit every point that is stated or implied in the principle. They hold that Christ meant His Gospel for all ages; that He wanted it made known to every where, and believed by all men; that He knew every difficulty and obstacle in the way of achieving that design; that He was able to cope with all those difficulties, and that He actually made provision, so far as in Him lay, and without setting aside human freedom of will, to have His Gospel so set forth that all men of good-will could learn the truth that He had revealed and preached.

FIDELITY TO THIS PRINCIPLE WILL ATTAIN GOAL

Since He has done His part, well and wisely, it follows that those who faithfully walk in His appointed ways, will reach their goal. They cannot miss it, unless they stray into other paths than His, or give up their effort to reach a knowledge of the truth. A simple illustration may possibly make this line of reasoning more lucid. A stranger in a small town asks how he may get to the postoffice. Certain instructions are given to him, and he goes on his way. Instead of reaching the postoffice he finds himself at a farm-house two miles distant. Now there can be but two ways of accounting for his mishap. Either he was not given correct instructions, or he himself made a mistake, misunderstanding what was said to him, or failing to do as he was told.

DISASTROUS RESULTS OF FOLLOWING PROTESTANT RULE OF FAITH

We, too, seek the way to a definite goal. We want to reach a knowledge of the truth. The way thither we are told is prayerful reading of the Bible. This is God's word, written under Divine inspiration. We must read it, study it, meditate on it; praying all the while to the Holy Spirit, who makes known to us the meaning of God's Book. This is the way prepared and ordained by Christ. By walking in it we shall attain to a real true knowledge of His Gospel.

Half a dozen men accept and act on these instructions. They are sincere searchers after the truth; they are intelligent and careful students; above all, they are prayerful men. In the course of their study, all take up the story of the Last Supper. They ask what the Lord meant when He said, after blessing and breaking bread: "This is My Body." That the words contain an important and vital truth, there can be no doubt. The solemnity of the hour and the Christ's conduct, no less than His constant seriousness of speech, make this absolutely certain. What then, is the truth that He wishes to convey in those four words?

The subject is studied thoroughly. Every other point of the text in which it bears upon the question is taken into account. What keen minded men have written and said is well weighed. The Spirit of Truth is faithfully invoked. In one word, the instructions given by Protestantism to seekers after the truth of Christ are carried out to the letter. Not one iota of the instructions is misunderstood, or overlooked, or neglected.

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS GIVEN SINGLE PASSAGE

After mature study those six men come together and compare notes. No two of them agree in their judgment of what Christ meant when He said: "This is My Body." Their opinions are not merely different in details; they are fundamentally diverse. They cannot be harmonized. One holds that after those words were spoken by Christ, there remained nothing of the substance, the inner reality of bread, but only its outward appearance, the substance having been totally changed into the substance of the Body of Christ.

A second maintains that the bread remains in its entirety, but that the Body of Christ is added thereto by His word; holds that no real change or increase is made by the words of the Lord, but that later on the Blessed Bread becomes the Body of Christ to him who eats it with faith. The fourth looks on the blessed bread and wine as a symbol of the Body and Blood of the Redeemer. The fifth considers the blessing, breaking and eating, a mere memorial of what Christ has done for us. The sixth concludes that the blessed bread and its eating are a mere sign, not of Christ's Body, nor of His sufferings, but of a compact or cov-

GRUBBING

is well begun and half done when you start it with —

Old Dutch Cleanser

enact that He has made with His followers.

We are not here and now concerned to know which one, if any, of these six men, has laid hold on the truth of Christ contained in these four words. This inquiry will be entered into later. The point which challenges our attention now is that no more than one of these men has found out the truth. Five out of the six have not reached the goal of correct knowledge. They are stranded far away from it in every direction. It is not in regard to this one question alone that we find this dismal failure to reach the truth. It confronts us no matter what religious question attracts our attention—the Divinity of Jesus Christ, His Virgin-birth, sacrificial worship, sacramental religion, the veneration of saints, the existence of an eternal hell, and so on down the line of religious beliefs.

HOW ACCOUNT FOR ERRORS IN PROTESTANTISM?

How are we to account for this state of affairs—for all this uncertainty and error that meets us at all times and everywhere in Protestant Christendom?

As we have already seen, there can be but two possible explanations of this sad fact. Either the instructions given to those who asked for Christ's way to the truth were incorrect, or they were not faithfully carried out. The latter explanation must be set aside. It does not fit with either charity or fact. To take it as the explanation of the innumerable differences of opinion that have been rife in the Christian world during the last four hundred years is to charge Protestant Christendom with forgetfulness of its own principles, or with downright lack of effort to find out the truth, or with an insidious unparaleled in human history. Let those who will, make such grave and sweeping charges against the Protestant world. For our part we look on them as no less unjust than unkind. Protestant Christians by the hundred thousand have read their Bibles and studied them; they have prayed earnestly for light from above to know the truth. They have carried out with scrupulous exactness the instructions Protestantism gave them when they asked it how they might learn the truth of Christ. They have not misunderstood those instructions; they have not forgotten them; they have not neglected to observe them; they have not disobeyed them. And yet by the million they have failed to reach the goal of truth. To explain that failure we must look to the theory on which the Protestant world has acted so consistently from the beginning. The fatal flaw is there.

READING OF BIBLE FOR ONE'S SELF NOT RIGHT ROAD TO TRUE KNOWLEDGE

Protestants have failed to get at the meaning of Christ's gospel; failed to reach the goal of knowledge, not because they have neglected to read their Bibles in a prayerful spirit, but because the reading of the Bible for one's self is not the right road to true knowledge. It leads, as the history of Protestant Christendom testifies eloquently, to uncertainty, to manifold, deep-rooted differences of opinion; to all manner of error, and not to that clear, safe, sure knowledge of the truth which Christ wished His followers to have. From this it follows that the reading of the Bible for one's self, independently of the Church that Christ established to be the champion, the custodian, and the authoritative interpreter of His gospel, is not Christ's way to the truth; it is not the means that He provided for our final instruction. His way, as all Christians must admit, is a straight way; one so plain that not even a fool can err therein; one that leads to that unity of faith for which He prayed and died.

PROTESTANT THEORY DEFECTIVE AND FALSE

These, my dear readers, are some of the reasons why we hold that the Protestant theory concerning the means established by Christ for the spread of His gospel, is defective and false.

LIQUOR AND TOBACCO HABITS

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false. It consists of two main points—first, that the Bible is the sole and sufficient rule of faith; secondly, that every man is to get at the meaning of the Bible for himself, through his own prayerful study of its sacred pages.

On the first of these assertions we have not dwelt directly. Our attention has been given almost exclusively to the second, which is also the more important part of the Protestant theory. We have argued that the Bible, privately interpreted, could not have been the sole means chosen by Christ for making His gospel known to the world; because it does not state the doctrines of Christ with sufficient clearness; because it is not, and never was able to present those doctrines to all classes of mankind; and because it does not lead those who use it in that way, to the appointed goal of knowledge. For proof of these contentions we pointed to the wide, deep differences of opinion that prevail in the Protestant world with regard to every Christian doctrine: to the facts that multitudes have neither the leisure nor the ability to read and meditate with sufficient care the difficult passages of Holy writ; that other multitudes have been unable to read at all; that others again had no Bibles to read, and could not have had them, since the art of printing had not yet been invented; that others had lived and died before men knew definitely and without doubt what writings were actually inspired; and, finally, to the most painful but highly illuminating fact, that the majority of those who sought the truth of Christ by reading the Scriptures for themselves have failed utterly and wretchedly to reach the goal of knowledge.

CATHOLIC CHURCH THE STEADFAST CHAMPION OF THE BIBLE

In what has been said, there is absolutely nothing in depreciation of the Bible. The Catholic Church and her children, have no sympathy with those who think little of sacred Scripture, or reckon it as anything less than the Word of God. We believe that it is divinely inspired through and through; we maintain that it does not teach any error; we reverence it; we love it; we treasure all that it teaches. If a Catholic were to question its authority, or to reject any of its doctrines he would be refused the Sacraments of the Church until he had sincerely repented of his errors. Where is there a Church that champions the Bible more steadily, sincerely, uncompromisingly, and effectually? Where is there one that guards the Bible more zealously against abuse and profanation? How comes it, then, we hear so often that the Catholic Church is the enemy of the Bible? There is not one shred of sound evidence to support those charges, while there is abundant and unquestionable proof that the Catholic Church has always been the friend of the Bible, and is to-day its sole, uncompromising defender among the Churches of Christendom.

BIBLE MUST HAVE AUTHORITY INTERPRETER

We say, it is true, that the Bible does not state the doctrines of Christ so clearly that all well-meaning and earnest men can know by their own study what those doctrines are. In making that assertion we take our stand by the side of experience and Holy Writ itself against the assumption that men do not need an authorized interpreter of God's book. Experience says that men have misinterpreted Scripture in ten thousand ways and more; Scripture says that in an Epistle of St. Paul, and in other inspired writings, there are certain things, hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction" (I St. Peter, iii, 16). We are at one, therefore, in saying that Holy Writ does not state the doctrines of Christ with sufficient clearness. What we attack is not the Bible, but the self-reliance of men who think that they can fathom its deep meaning by their own efforts, and with utter disregard of the Church that Christ established as "The Pillar and the ground of Truth."

We say again, taking cognizance of manifold and overwhelming evidence, that the Bible alone does not set the doctrines of Christ before all classes of men. We are not thereby finding fault with the Bible, nor are we denying to its real and rightful share in the formation of Christian faith and morals. We are simply indicating the blindness and folly of the theory that would make the Bible the sole and sufficient rule of faith—sole and sufficient for the blind, for those unable to read, for those who lived when Bibles were rare because of the cost and difficulty of multiplying them, as well as for the leaured, the talented and the educated.

We say once more that the Bible alone, privately interpreted, does not lead all men who read it to a knowledge of the truth. Here, as before, we take account of palpable facts, and with them in our mind, refuse to ascribe to Holy Scripture a role which it does not claim for itself, and certainly does not fill.

In a word, what we have had to say has not been against the Bible, nor in circumscription of its authority and usefulness, but in criticism and disproof of certain extravagant Protestant theories concerning the Bible—theories which might be thought at first sight calculated to exalt the Scriptures, but which sober reflection, dwelling on the facts of history and experience, and on the Written Word itself, declares unsound, and such as would in the long run bring the Word of God into discredit.—The Missionary.

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