

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

"Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil." (Matt. iv. 1.)

Jesus, as far as He was man, was guided by the Holy Spirit, and feeling impelled by the Spirit to go into the desert, He went without delay, Christians, in whom the Holy Ghost dwells are prompted to do right and practice good works, and St. Paul says: "Whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii, 14) If we wish to be true children of God, we must follow the promptings of His Holy Spirit, who stimulates our will to what is good, but does not compel us to do it, because we are free to cooperate with His action.

Even the holiest suggestions of the Holy Ghost remain fruitless, unless we exert ourselves to comply with them. This is why our knowledge is not to confuse our resolutions and our desires unfulfilled; this is why so many of our days are wasted, and in spite of pious thoughts and words we make no progress in well doing. We ought to be able to say always with the Psalmist: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enjoin a large heart." (Ps. cxviii, 32)

It is for the Holy Ghost to enlighten, lead and urge us on our way, but it is for us to run; we ought, however, to be on our guard against the suggestions of our own vanity and self-love with the promptings of the Holy Spirit. A work which we feel impelled to undertake may in itself be excellent, and yet our impulse to do it may not proceed from the Holy Ghost; and we often must examine our motives very carefully before we can be sure that our impulse is from God.

Supposing we discover some bad motive, for instance, a desire to please ourselves or to appear, when doing some unusually good deed, we do it because of an obstinate determination to do something extraordinary, although it involves the neglect of what is strictly our duty—then the impulse is not from the Holy Ghost, or, at least, it is not altogether from Him, but self-love is mingled with it. Where this is the case, we are led, not by the Spirit that led our Lord, but by the spirit of self-will, that is none the better for being hidden under a cloak of piety, but is more dangerous and more subtle than other forms of obstinacy. Let us therefore ask God always to preserve us from any impulse proceeding from self-will that pretends to be pious, but, on the contrary, to give us strength at all times and in all circumstances to follow the Holy Spirit.

The desert chosen by our Lord for His forty days' fast was that known now as Quarantana, between Jerusalem and Jericho, the same wilderness in which, according to Christ's parable, the man travelling from Jerusalem fell into the hands of robbers, and was afterwards found and rescued by the Good Samaritan. The fathers of the Church regard this man as a type of the whole human race, which had fallen under the dominion of sin, and had been robbed of the supernatural life of sanctifying grace, whilst the Samaritan, who saved and healed mankind, was our Lord Himself.

Therefore, He began to prepare Himself for the task of saving and healing souls in the very desert where the Samaritan had professed Him by showing charity to the wounded travellers.

"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." We must not understand these words to mean that the Holy Ghost arranged the temptation, but rather that He foresaw how Jesus would be tempted there, and allowed it. Why should Jesus be tempted? Was it befitting the character of the Messiah? Yes, and we may learn most consoling lessons from the reasons why He was tempted. St. John Chrysostom tells us that it was His will to suffer the temptation, in order that those who after baptism are grievously assailed by it, may not be discouraged and confused, as if something extraordinary were befalling them, but may withstand the temptation steadfastly, regarding it as a necessary sequel to their confession of faith. They have taken up arms in order to fight, not to remain at peace. Hence the thought of our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness should give us comfort; the fact of being tempted is no reason for sorrow, and all excessive sadness, anxiety and confusion in time of temptation are injuries, for they diminish our confidence and courage, and therefore are allies of the evil one. It is no sin to be tempted; the sin is to consent to temptation.

With what calm dignity did Jesus encounter the tempter! It was His will to undergo temptation to teach us how we ought to act when tempted; and the first lesson that we learn from His example is to trust quietly in God. Excessive fear suggests the thought that it is impossible for us to resist. Such fear may appear pious, but it is really very bad, and we ought to answer the suggestion by saying: "Of course I cannot resist in my own strength, but I can do so through Him whose incomprehensible love makes Him always ready to help us with His power."

Our Lord displayed His infinite love by allowing Himself to be tempted. He wanted to show us how thoroughly in every point He became one of ourselves, sin only excepted. He went into the wilderness to prove clearly that as He was tempted Himself, He can help those who are also tempted, and that He

won strength and grace for us to be able to resist, as He did. Therefore, if we study His temptation, we shall be delivered from all doubt as to our ability to resist our own; and we shall be firmly convinced of His love, ever powerful to help us; we shall be inflamed with love of Him, and shall rejoice when this love is put to the test in many painful struggles, and our repeated victories procure us more merit for heaven.

The temptations undergone by our Lord in the wilderness were not the only ones that He suffered—He was tempted to the hour of His death. Were not the threats and persecution of His enemies temptations, suggesting to Him to abandon His sacred task of teaching, consoling and saving mankind? But neither the temptations of the devil nor the hostility of men could make Him display to His heavenly Father. He triumphed in the turmoil of the city and amidst the outcry of His angry foes, as He had done on the lonely banks of the Jordan. Like His resurrection, His whole life and His death were an uninterrupted triumph; and the life of every Christian should be the same. We know not what our life may bring forth, nor does it matter, if only the whole of it is a victory over temptation and sin. Let us beg the Holy Ghost to guide and direct us, promising to obey His suggestions, admonitions and commands. When the last temptation has left us, death will carry us up to the summit of the holy mountain, and we shall behold the indescribable happiness bestowed by God upon those who worship Him, and our lot will be with the angels in heaven. Amen.

TEMPERANCE

WHY NOT MAKE IT A LIFE CUSTOM?

Many Catholics, it may be taken for granted, will practise total abstinence from intoxicants, as a Lenten observance. This act of self-denial is recommended as a voluntary offset to the present greatly modified rule of fasting, and it is, we believe, more common among all classes than most persons suppose. It is an excellent method of self-discipline while it lasts, and it possesses other advantages that might be expected to commend it to the temperate as a permanent habit. Aside from the spiritual aspect of this form of self-denial, there is an economic aspect that should appeal successfully to those of a practical bent.

It is a fact that the forty days' disuse of intoxicants finds the abstainer no worse off in the end, physically or otherwise, for that voluntary act of mortification. On the contrary, the common belief is that he is emphatically very much better off in every respect. That being so, their is the best of reasons—several of them in truth—why the practise should be indefinitely prolonged. The Lenten abstainer conclusively proves that he can eschew strong drink without detriment to his health, for a given period, and with a corresponding benefit to both his spiritual nature and his pocket book. The practise for a number of weeks of such restraint facilitates the cultivation of the same as a confirmed habit. Therefore it demands no great exertion of will power to develop the Lenten custom into a life custom, if one so elects, especially since the effort involves a substantial material gain without the slightest sacrifice of anything essential to the real pleasure of existence.

Let even the "moderate drinker" mathematically weigh the advantage, from a purely utilitarian standpoint, of making this Lenten mortification a matter of permanent practise. He will discover that it opens a most promising avenue to worldly prosperity, if nothing more. The sum spent annually in this country for intoxicating liquors exceeds that expended for the most necessary staples of subsistence. The national drink bill for a year would amply suffice to house every artisan's family in the land in a decent and comfortable home of its own. The annual drink bill of the average user of intoxicants, would, if put aside in a lump, make of him a capitalist in the course of a surprising short time. Most of us are vainly devising ways and means of achieving a competency against old age. Most of us, strangely enough, deliberately overlook the surest and the only sure method of accomplishing what we desire. Why? Because it entails what we stupidly choose to regard as too great an act of self-denial.—San Francisco Monitor.

GOOD EXAMPLE

Captain Rideau, a French officer killed in action, was a fine example of the Christian soldier. He read a passage from "The Imitation" every day. During January he walked long distances to hear Mass and to receive Communion. He had the happiness of receiving on the day before his death. One of his men, writing to the Captain's son, said of the gallant officer: "What gave him his prestige with his men was the fact that he was in all things and everywhere a convinced Christian and acted as such. When we were resting in a village we saw him go to the church for all the services. God alone knew how many he drew to the practise of their duties by his example. One day, when one of our men was grievously wounded, our Captain knelt down by his side and helped him to make an Act of Contrition."—Sacred Heart Review.

"THREE THURSDAYS"

"Nine Fridays" is a phrase well-known in every Catholic home. But the "Three Thursdays" is as Father Russell, S. J., points out, an expression rarely heard.

As these days are particularly linked with the Holy Eucharist, devout Catholics will probably approach themselves for paying little heed to this special invitation to communicate that is extended on these days. Holy Thursday, Ascension Thursday and the Feast of Corpus Christi are the only religious ceremonies that are attached to the fifth day of the week.

On Holy Thursday, Catholics should be spiritually present with those First Communicants to whom Christ gave the Sacred Bread. This solemn day was not chosen arbitrarily to do honor to the Blessed Eucharist, but because it was on this day that our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled His promise and instituted this memorial of His love on the night before He suffered.

How is Ascension Thursday connected with the Blessed Sacrament? Because the commemoration of the departure of our divine Redeemer must needs call to our minds His abiding presence with us. When our Lord goes from us on the clouds of heaven, it is impossible not to try and calm our troubled hearts by reminding ourselves of the supreme device of His love by means of which, though He has gone, He will be with us still.

The date of Corpus Christi was not fixed beforehand by the circumstances of the event it commemorates, but was deliberately chosen for the following reasons: This great feast of the Blessed Sacrament was intended to make amends to the faithful for the restraints placed on their piety on Holy Thursday itself when the nearness of Good Friday hindered them from making it a sufficiently joyful festival. What day should be chosen? There was a certain fitness in selecting some day as soon as possible after the completion of the yearly cycle of feasts which commemorated the event of our Lord's life on earth. That cycle closes with Pentecost; what day, therefore, after the octave of Whitsunday shall be the glorious feast of reparation and thanksgiving for the Holy Eucharist? The Thursday of the first week after Whitsunday is Corpus Christi—not preferred at random to other days in the week, but out of homage to the particular day on which the most Blessed Sacrament was instituted.

As days of reparation and thanksgiving the "Three Thursdays" should be as dear to the Catholic as the "Nine Fridays."—New World.

A SHORT INSTRUCTION ON THE HOLY BIBLE

THE BIBLE AND THE SECTS

By Rev. J. S. Vaughan
Mr. W. H. Mallock is not a Catholic but he is a shrewd observer, and often expresses Catholic doctrines, not only accurately, but in a manner to attract attention, and almost to command assent. In 1900 he published an exceedingly interesting book entitled Doctrine and Doctrinal Disruption, in which he contains the perfectly logical position of the Catholic Church with the hopelessly illogical position of the various sects, more especially the Anglican. His testimony, as coming from an outsider, is so valuable that I propose, in this concluding chapter, to speak rather by his lips than by my own.

All Protestants of course believe in the Bible, but, as Mr. Mallock very emphatically insists, "until they can tell us definitely, coherently and fully on what foundations they believe and their interpretations of the Bible rest, all the emphasis they expend in asserting their rival doctrines is as meaningless as the crowing of cocks in a farmyard" (p. 76) Now, if we proceed to inquire what these foundations are, we shall find that "some will declare that their faith rests on (1) the unanimous consent of the Church during all periods of its existence; others, that it rests on (2) the doctrines and practices of the Church during the earlier periods of its existence; others, that it rests on (3) the individual study of the Bible as the only inspired book; and (4) others, that it depends upon the individual study of the Bible as the best of inspired books" (p. 77.) Such are the answers of the various sects as described by Mr. Mallock. He then goes on to observe that "there is yet another answer, which all these four answers absolutely agree in repudiating, and this is the answer given by the Church of Rome.

The Church of Rome, when asked on what grounds we are to believe in the Bible, and by what means, believing in it, we are to discriminate its true meaning, answers us that these grounds and means are a Roman Church itself, which is an ever living and ever infallible teacher the same Church to-day as it was on the day of Pentecost; and which, though it speaks officially at distant intervals only, so speaks, when it does speak, in a manner which all can recognize, thus progressively defining the faith, and successive definitions become necessary. This claim to a living infallibility, with a definite organ of utterance, which is made by the Church of Rome, is denied by all Anglicans equally." In fact, as Mr. Mallock goes on to point out, "the denial of it is almost the only point, except the existence of God, with regard to which all Anglicans remain really unanimous; and

here their unanimity is more than real—it is passionate. It is a point of brotherly and intimate spiritual agreement between Lord Halifax and the gentleman whom he calls a blaspheming brawler, Mr. Hensell" (p. 78.) It is, of course, a well-known historical fact, that all the sects, at the time of the "Reformation," made the Bible the only supreme spiritual authority in the world; and they did this because, being but human themselves, they were unable to look into the distant future, to discern the signs of the times, and to see upon what a treacherous and sandy bank they were building, and how soon it was destined to crumble away. But to resume our quotation: "Slowly, and yet inevitably, the centuries have wrought their changes. That old foundation, the Bible, has ceased, in itself, to be a foundation any longer. It moves, it shifts, it totters. It will support no structure, unless something outside itself shall be found which will support it. That something the Roman Church supplied; and now reformed Christendom is beginning at last to find that, for that something which it rejected and still rejects, it is necessary to find a substitute" (p. 79.)—Our Sunday Visitor.

AN UNPUBLISHED BIT OF IRISH HISTORY

Casually and unexpectedly one of the sweetest bits of Irish history that has ever been penned has just fallen into my hands. It has never been published, as far as I know, either in book, magazine or newspaper. But it appears where, I do not doubt, it is appreciated. It is a dear and gallant little story of the time of "the Flight of the Earls." It is as follows:

When Rory O'Donnell was flying to the Continent he left behind him a little granddaughter in London under the care of her grandmother. The child grew up a sturdy Catholic, a beautiful girl, notable for all the graces of mind and body for which long line of royal ancestors had been famous for a thousand years. When the young lady had reached the age of twenty-one her marvelous beauty became noised about, and soon the question of her marriage was discussed at the English court.

In those days the British sovereign had extraordinary powers over the fate of a ward. And in due time the mandate went forth: she had to get married, and to a Protestant. So said the sovereign and the court. But they reckoned without their host. They ought to have understood an O'Donnell.

"No," said the Irish beauty, "a Catholic or none." And thus the battle commenced. They held out. She stood firm. They stormed, she rejoiced, and entreated by turn. Scorn flashed from the deep blue eyes, and the daughter of a hundred kings and warriors reiterated: "A Catholic or none."

All hands were now against the brave young lady with the exception of her grandmother. But soon signs of faltering showed in this quarter, and Rory O'Donnell's granddaughter made her resolution accordingly. The uniforms of two military officers were procured by her. And one evening two dashing young soldiers strutted down "London town" with all the grace and nonchalance of two Beau Brummels.

The rest seems more like what one would find in a novel than in every-day life even in that stirring age. But this account is taken from the manuscript of the Pappal Nuncio at Brussels, his report to Rome. This manuscript is now in the archives of one of the great Roman libraries, the name of which I do not feel at liberty to disclose here. Further down I shall explain the reason of this reticence. But let me proceed. Two fine young officers, as I have said, swaggered down "London town," and next morning went out the hue and cry: "The Lady O'Donnell and her maid were missing!"

Now, that young woman's head had been screwed on properly. She did not go far. Lady and maid lay low in the city suburbs until the hue and cry had subsided. Then they started for the coast. It was not the first time an O'Donnell had out-generaled "the King and his army."

They fortunately found a vessel bound for Flanders, where O'Donnell, her brother, was then serving as a colonel in the army. But a storm broke. The vessel was driven out of her course, and shipwreck overtook her passengers. The two young officers were thrown up on the coast of Spain. But here they could not remain, so they reshipped, only to meet with a similar misfortune a few days later. Nothing daunted, the gallant pair embarked again, but fate proved still unkind. They were shipwrecked for the third time and thrown up on the coast of France.

So ends the sweet story. Why do I withhold the name of the library in which the manuscript lies? Because an Irish historian in Rome, who is preparing some volumes that will one day throw a flood of light on matters now taken for granted, means to use it some day. To him the honor and credit. Honor where honor is due.—Varietas in the Philadelphia Standard and Times.

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No man could bear to live if he knew all that was happening in the world at one time.—Benson.

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