

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY THE REV. F. P. HICKEY, O. S. B.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways." (Prov. viii, 22)

The dominant thought in this holy time of Advent is the coming of the Redeemer. How appropriate it is then, that there occurs at this time the Festival of the Immaculate Conception. For the Son of God offering Himself to become a Man to redeem us, a Mother had to be chosen for Him. A Mother of God! Picture the amazement of the angels in heaven that a human creature could possibly be so exalted! The purest, the holiest, the humblest of all the daughters of Eve was chosen.

But above all the endowments of grace, above all her virtues, one singular prerogative was needed and was granted. This chosen one should never for an instant be under the curse of fallen man. Original sin could not be allowed to taint her soul. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways." This is what we believe in accepting and professing the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

But is it not the boast and glory of the Holy Catholic Church that its faith is and has been always the same? That what was believed from the first is the faith of all its children always and everywhere? How can this be, says the world, when within our memory the Immaculate Conception was declared to be an article of faith? The definition was simply a declaration that belief in the Immaculate Conception had always existed, and was the mind and sense of the Church. Proof irrefragable of this is found in holy Tradition, in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, in the unanimity of the rulers and the faithful of the Church in venerating our Lady's Conception as such. What had been formerly freely, willingly, lovingly believed, was now declared to be a necessary part of our belief. Henceforth obedience to the Church demanded full, explicit belief and profession of this doctrine, that Mary in the first instant of her Conception was preserved from every stain of original sin by the power of Almighty God, to His honor and glory, and the glory of His chosen Mother.

And why was this declaration necessary? To defend the honor and glory of Mary. Impiety was assailing her; disbelief was denying her holiness; and the world was sneering at her purity. Cowardly Catholics thought it prudent not to provoke impiety to insult our Lady and wished to be silent; and doubt was stealing into the souls of the poorly instructed, and of many seduced by the irreligious. Therefore for God's honor and glory, and of His Virgin Mother, it was made imperative to believe and to own that the Virgin Mary was Immaculate. What had formerly been professed in love, had now to be professed in obedience as well, by the loyal children of the Church.

The other saints and blessed ones of God are crowned with many graces, but Mary is "full of grace," and is favored with one that no other can share with her. She is Immaculate! And this being her unique privilege, no other supplication to her touches her Mother's heart as this: "Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us, who have recourse to thee."

Two effects result from this belief and profession in the Immaculate Conception. The first is a wonderful increase in devotion to our Blessed Lady.

Not only have prayers been multiplied, but the wearing of her medals, the use of the Rosary, the holy pictures and statues in homes and in churches, all have increased. But above all we can notice the public testifying of our love and veneration of Mary. A few years ago, pilgrimages had almost died out in these countries. But now, not only is no one afraid to be a pilgrim, but publicly and enthusiastically pilgrimages are joined by rich and poor. The sneers of the world are silenced. Yea, even in non-Catholic papers we read paragraphs—tolerant, kindly, sympathetic—about the blind and ailing journeying to distant Lourdes in faith and hope, seeking the help of Mary Immaculate.

And does Mary fail to respond to her children's faith and trust? This is the second wonderful result in the belief in the Immaculate Conception: the miracles that Mary works through her intercession. There are countless wonders in the souls of men; of those we know nothing. They are recorded by the angels. But we Catholics rejoice, and the world cannot deny, that there are many marvellous and incontestable miracles wrought year after year at Lourdes. In this age of doubt and unbelief, miracles are multiplied in behalf of those who turn to the Immaculate Virgin in their misery and distress. Thus the most favored, honor, exalted Queen of angels and of saints proves that she hearkens to and graciously answers the prayers of poor sinners. She loves to prove to us that, though she is the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, she is our Mother too. Though the Almighty "has done great things for her," she does not disdain our humble prayer.

How meet and appropriate it is, then, that our Blessed Lady's festival is the harbinger of Christmas. Her unique dignity—Immaculate from the first moment of her Conception—was given that she might be worthy to be the Mother of our divine Saviour. Praise and glorify her on this great day, and for a reward for our devotion pray her to show us at Christmas her Son, our Saviour, and to obtain for us loyalty and fidelity to Him.

CIVILIZED MEN OLD AT FORTY

The highest authority in America, Prof. McCollum says: "Old age disease deaths have doubled within thirty years, every year younger persons being attacked, due mostly to faulty foods." In these thirty years patent white flour and refined cereals were invented and diseases of the heart, arteries, kidneys, brain, nerves, and digestive organs have kept even pace with their ever-increasing use, until now 105,000 young people die each year in the States alone under forty, from diseases which belong to seventy or beyond.

A return to a natural, unrefined, non-acid dietary of whole grains, milk, eggs, leafy vegetables, and fruits will go far to protect civilized man from the ravages of these diseases, unknown to simple races who do not use refined products.

Roman Meal is the only non-acid grain or cereal food, 400 parts "Excess Alkali" in each 1,000 parts, alkaline enough to correct the "Excess Acids" of white flour, other cereals, meats, fats, and sweets, all known to modern food science as "Excess Acid" foods, because they turn the blood from its natural alkalinity to acid. Acid blood lowers vitality, irritates vital organs, prevents body repair, prematurely bringing on old age and disease. Roman Meal keeps the blood alkaline or non-acid, relieves the organs of irritation and strain and rebuilds them, restoring youthfulness and vigor of body and mind. Being non-acid it cools the blood and keeps you upstanding and fit.

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A SAINT ON DANCING

The following passage from the eminently sane St. Francis de Sales, in the "Introduction to a Devout Life," gives the sensible position on dancing:

"Dances in their nature are indifferent things; but as they are but too often performed they are very prone to become evils. They are full of dangers. They are pleasures of the night. But in the night and in the darkness evil creeps in very easily. The more so in an entertainment which, by its very nature, inclines to evil. They are protracted deep into the night, which makes a person unfit to get up early, and thus robs one of the time to serve God. It is at all times folly to change the day into night, light into darkness, good works into play. The partakers vie with each other in vanity, and vanity is but too often the proximate occasion to evil thought and dangerous spooning. I, therefore, tell thee, regarding dancing, what the physicians say about mushrooms. The best of them are of no account. The best dances are not worth much. But if you must eat mushrooms, see to it that they be well prepared. If, for some reason, you must attend a ball, prepare yourself. The preparation should consist of modesty and good intention. Eat mushrooms but rarely, and then very little, says the physician. Dance little, and not often, say I. If you do otherwise you are in danger to get a liking for the dance. Mushrooms easily draw the poison out of the ground where they grow. Balls and dances have a tendency to attract the vicious elements."

GROPING TOWARDS BETTER THINGS

For a long time discerning men, with souls attuned to the richer harmonies of life and with minds appreciative of the higher values of human existence, have complained of the unsatisfactoriness of modern civilization; now this painful sentiment, that an essential quality is lacking in the general make-up of the world in which we live, is becoming more common and pronounced. It has become articulate through magazines and newspapers that are always quick to reflect the temper of the passing hour and to catch the fleeting mood of the public. Our generation is beginning to realize that, in its feverish activity and in its mighty endeavors, it has missed something which above all things it ought to possess and without which it can enjoy none of the things for which it has toiled and labored. The tremendous efficiency of which it boasted has somehow miscarried and failed to yield what was expected. That elusive something that makes life really worth while and living a joy, we seek in vain in the world around us.

It is a promising sign that our age is no longer feeling comfortable among the things which it has

created and that it is reaching out for those better things that give dignity, value and zest to human existence. The poignant sentiment of disillusionment that is torturing our age and making it pause in its wonted pursuits is an earnest of a return to easier and nobler ways of living. The living generation, in spite of its apparent frivolity and artificiality, has again become conscious of the stirring of its soul that had long been forgotten and sadly neglected. It is experiencing a change of heart and mind. A hunger and craving for spiritual things are awakening in many hearts. The absorption in the things of the sense has been proved unprofitable. The soul is coming into its own.

For a time we were proud of living in what was called with much aptness and fitness an industrial age. We gloated over the expansion of industry. We rejoiced at the increased production of commodities and at the multiplication of material goods. We did not notice the simultaneous deterioration of men and the decline of human happiness. Industry had assumed undue proportions in our life; from a means it had become an end. Gradually it has usurped a dominant position and instead of serving man it had enslaved him. Is not the hurry with which the modern man and woman perform their work, the excitement under which they labor, an eloquent sign that they are only trying to get through with unpleasant tasks? The demand for more production has truly made a slave

of man. It has taken the joy out of work and rendered it hateful; for no slave ever loved his work. Thus we have discontent, unrest, destitution in the midst of plenty, and a restlessness that drives man from change to change and permits him to find peace nowhere. This is the precious legacy of an industrial age, an age that placed material values first and scorned the things that were not tangible and that could not be expressed in figures.

This age is coming to an end. Even craze for pleasure and the wild demand for excitement, so evident everywhere, indicate at bottom that man's longing for the spiritual has again been awakened and is keenly aroused. Material civilization is giving him all that it can give; but it still leaves him dissatisfied. Not long, and man will turn his eyes in the right direction and seek and find the things that will also nourish his soul. He will reinstate the spiritual in its rightful position, and make the material subservient to the higher aims of life. Not inappropriately this interesting phenomenon that we see going on under the surface of daily events has been styled a spiritual awakening. It means that man is becoming aware and mindful of his real needs; that he is beginning to see that he has been trying to feed on chaff his soul almost starved on such a diet. To carry around with oneself a starving soul, that is clamoring for a nutriment in keeping with its nature, cannot but make life miserable and intolerable. So the modern generation will listen

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to the demands of the soul in order to find the peace and rest which it has not tasted for such a prolonged period.

A civilization, freed from the spell of industrialism and giving proper recognition to spiritual values, will bring back to us many things for which we have been longing. It will restore beauty and gladness in a world that has become drab and gloomy. It will restore peace and contentment in a world that was torn with strife and embittered. Instead of morbid excitement that exhausts the body and leaves the mind empty, it will give the soul calm possession of itself and, with that, supreme joy and happiness. This spiritual awakening cannot be full and lasting except for the co-operation of religion, for which it consequently represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Religion will not be found wanting; it will quicken the spiritual sense and bring it to finest and richest flowering.—Catholic Standard and Times.

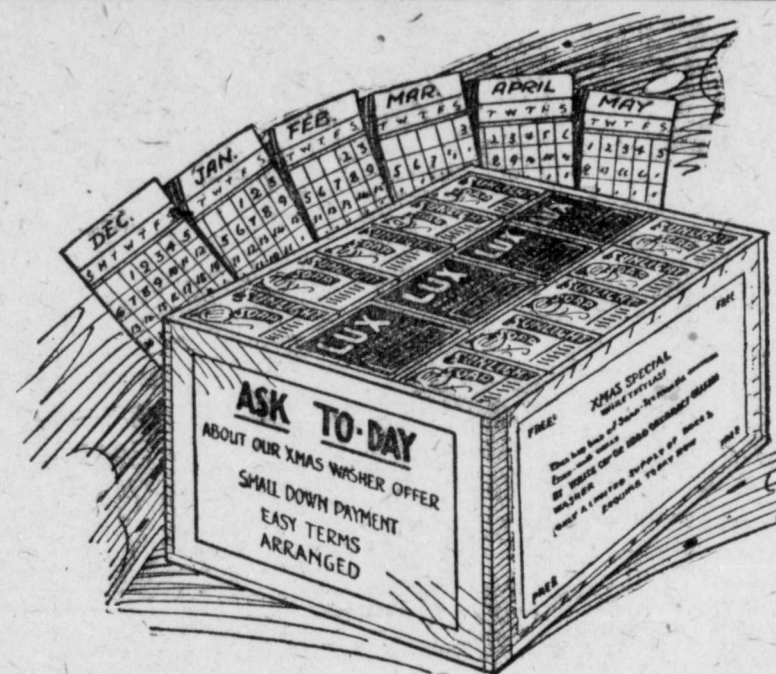
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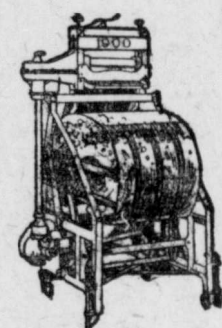


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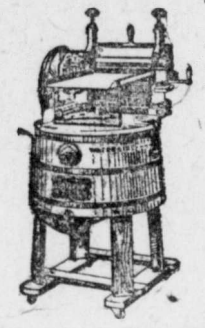
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