

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. F. HICKET, O.S.B.
SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF THE ASCENSION

CHARITY

"Before all things have a constant, mutual charity." (1 Pet. iv. 8.)
It is an authoritative voice that we hear to-day, and no uncertain word does it utter. The Sunday after the Ascension, when we might easily dwell upon our Lord's blessing His Disciples and being carried up to heaven—the Sunday before Pentecost, when we should study how to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit—and yet St. Peter breaks in: "Before all things have a constant, mutual charity."

Yes, my dear brethren, if we want to follow our Saviour to heaven, if we want to prepare our hearts for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we cannot do better than cultivate a constant, mutual charity. Notice the stress St. Peter lays on these words. He says: "Before all things have a constant, mutual charity, and watch in prayer." But before all things have a constant, mutual charity, for charity covereth a multitude of sins." (1 Pet. iv. 7, 8.) He says this to good people who have received the grace of God, "who are the good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (Ibid. 10.) We need not, therefore, think that we are above learning the lesson, and that his words are only intended for careless, negligent people, and not for those who treasure the grace of God and try to preserve it by prayers, Mass, and the prudent observance of the Commandments.

The truth is that the last thing good people usually learn is to have a "constant, mutual charity." Yet we should have it "before all things." It is the want of charitableness that makes virtue even so unlovely. The world dislikes the good man, thinking that piety must go hand-in-hand with narrow-mindedness, fault-finding, hardness, readiness to believe the worst. And the world is not far wrong in very many cases; for these are the faults that are the last to be given up by good people.

Whereas good people should be full of sympathy, affection and benevolence. Above all things have charity. Charity "thinketh no evil." (1 Cor. xiii. 5.) So when you hear unkind things said, do not believe them; do not be ready to think evil. When you see things which may even scandalize you, do not be ready to be vexed. Look at the other side. Everything has two sides to it. Do not be fair-minded; and if you cannot find an excuse for it, leave it to God. It is not your business. You are only a poor sinner, hoping to be forgiven, as you forgive. And, lastly do not repeat any unkind thing, true or false. Let it drop. It is only a foul thing, so why should you pass it from hand to hand as if it were something precious?

None of us, perhaps, are altogether uncharitable; but that is not sufficient. St. Peter bids us have "a constant mutual charity." Those two qualities make the difficulty. "Constant" means that charity must not be just a whim or liking, or only when we're in the humor. We hear it said sometimes as the great praise: "That man is liked by everybody—he is always the same." The same, yes, constant. What an amiable trait in one's character! How much good must it effect through life!

Anyone who is a brother, who needs a kind thought, word or action is a fitting object of our mutual charity. How frequently is charity narrowly limited just to those we like! Others jar upon us. Whenever they may say or do irritates us. We are quick to find fault, to slight, to show resentment to such as these. If our charity is such, it is merely a natural feeling, and not a virtue at all. It may have its reward in this world, but will never raise our souls to heaven.

Now, it is not an easy or a common thing, my dear brethren, to possess this constant mutual charity, or St. Peter would not have had to lay such emphasis upon it. "Above all things," he says, "have a constant, mutual charity."

We have, then, to cultivate it. Ground requires to be broken up and prepared to cultivate it, and so with our hearts, if they are hard, and sour and embittered. It is a real work to do it, and a work that must be done. We must be charitable, for we have "a multitude of sins" to be covered.

When we reflect, in being charitable, who it is that we are imitating, there should be no unwillingness nor hesitation in our hearts. We are asked to be like Christ. "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart." (Matt. xi. 29.) And are St. Peter would not have had to lay such emphasis upon it. "Above all things," he says, "have a constant, mutual charity."

Learn, then, the lessons. First, "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven." (Luke vi. 37.) Be grateful to God if you have the grace to be the first to give way, to speak, to apologize. That is your honor and glory. You have proved thereby that you are a follower of Christ, who said on the cross, "Father, forgive them." (Luke xxiii. 34.) The devil may say, "Oh no; stand on your rights; have a proper pride and haughtiness in you, as it did him who is tempting you." Secondly, practise speaking kindly. "A mild answer breaketh wrath."

(Prov. xv. 1.) How often human nature launches out with a sneer, an angry word, a bitter retort! It has gone. We cannot recall it. Alas! the pity of it. How many sins and crimes have been committed in this world by those who were goaded on by unkind, unjust and ranking words!

The third and last lesson for cultivating charity is to do kind things. The very doing them sweetens your own heart, gladdens it, sanctifies it. The Master, who bade us learn of Him, "went about doing good." (Acts x. 38.) How many to whom He had worked miracles, were faithless and untrue to Him; how many sinned and sinned against Him, but He faltered not in doing good! And so must we do. Look not for gratitude and many words of thanks. Look at the honour of imitating Christ our Lord.

The reward will come hereafter. And you remember in the Gospel, when the King shall say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father; possess the kingdom prepared for you." (Matt. xxv. 34.) The reward is all for acts of kindness. "When I was hungry you gave me to eat"—thirsty, a stranger, sick, and in prison, you were kind to Me.

With that reward and blessing before you, be determined before all things to have a constant, mutual charity; proved by daily action, forgiveness, kind words and deeds of mercy and of love.

A LIVING WAGE

IV.—THE MOST IMPORTANT INDUSTRIAL QUESTION OF OUR TIME

BY REV. JOHN A. HAN, D. D.
(Catholic Press Association)

Up to the present we have given no more specific definition of a living wage than that it is the equivalent of a decent livelihood, or a sum sufficient to maintain the worker and his family in conditions of reasonable comfort. The attempt to define it in terms of money is beset with many difficulties. Some housekeepers are much better managers than others in making purchases and in utilizing them; the number and quantity of concrete goods that suffice for decent living conditions, for example, in the matters of recreation and non-material things, do not easily submit to exact measurement; the variation in the cost of commodities from city to city, and from section to section, renders any single estimate inadequate; and finally the recent extraordinary rise in prices, culminating in the present abnormal cost of living, has made almost all previous estimates antiquated.

Nevertheless, the difficulties are not insurmountable. They can be overcome sufficiently to yield approximate estimates that will be of great practical value. That is all that we can expect, and indeed, all that we require in a matter of this kind. We are dealing with the realm of moral approximations, not with the province of exact science. While the cost of living of a working-man's family varies indefinitely on account of the varying proficiency of the housewife, we have to consider only the average level of domestic economy and efficiency. This average is ascertainable quite as definitely as a hundred other important social facts. The goods that are required to provide a minimum decent level of existence, can be estimated with sufficient accuracy to safeguard the welfare of the laborer and his family. The variation of prices over space and time can be dealt with by making the estimates of a living wage apply only to specific places and specific dates.

THE MINIMUM COST OF LIVING FOR A FAMILY OF FIVE

Within recent years we have been provided with many such estimates. For example, the New York Bureau of Standards concluded in 1915 that the minimum cost of living for a family of five was a little less than \$850 annually. In the same year a commission of members of the legislature gave an estimate of about \$875 for the same city, and about \$100 less for Buffalo. Within the last few months a municipal commission in Dallas fixed the annual amount necessary for "bare existence" at \$747, and the amount required for "a safe normal living" at a little less than \$1,100. The difference between this estimate and those of New York authorities is explained partly by the great increase in prices between 1915 and 1917, and partly by the large allowance for various kinds of insurance.

Comparing these estimates with several others that have been made, both since and before the outbreak of the War, we are confident that the minimum annual cost of decent living for a man and wife and three small children should be placed somewhere between \$750 and \$1,000. If we have in mind the level of prices that prevailed just before the War, the former figure would suffice for all places except the very large cities. If we are thinking of present prices, the estimate should be increased by at least 25%.

METHODS FOR PUTTING LIVING WAGE PRINCIPLE INTO PRACTICE

Inasmuch as we have the assurance of experts that some two-thirds of the adult males of the United States have never received and do not now receive these rates of wages, the question of putting the living wage principle into practice is of primary importance.

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Four methods are conceivable by which a living wage might become universal. The first is the automatic operation of economic forces. Some twenty or twenty-five years ago, this theory enjoyed considerable favor among economists. It took substantially this form: capital is increasing much faster than labor; therefore, its demand for labor is increasing relatively to the supply; therefore, the remuneration of labor will necessarily increase. The fatal flaw in this argument is its neglect of the fact that a large proportion of the new capital takes the place of labor, thereby reducing instead of enhancing the demand for laborers. Machines are constantly made to do the work of men, and so far as we can see, the process will go on indefinitely. The remuneration of underpaid labor measured by its purchasing capacity, has decreased rather than increased during the last quarter of century. No economic forces are discernible that are likely to cause a contrary movement within the next twenty-five years.

LEVEL MIGHT BE REACHED THROUGH BENEVOLENCE OF EMPLOYERS

The second agency that might theoretically be expected to raise the wages of the underpaid is the benevolence of employers. Only visionaries put any faith in this method, in so far as experience is a guide, it warns us that only an insignificant minority of employers will ever voluntarily increase the remuneration of employees who are getting less than living wages. Were the number of those disposed to do so multiplied indefinitely, they would not be able to carry out their lofty designs. Owing to the force and keenness of competition, the great majority of employers must conform to the wage standards fixed by their most selfish competitors. A benevolent majority might, indeed, raise wage rates to the level of decency by combining for that purpose. Our readers would not thank us for inviting them to consider seriously such a fantastic hypothesis.

The third conceivable method is that of organization by the laborers themselves. While labor unions have done much, very much, to increase wages within the last forty years, their influence in this field has been mainly restricted to the skilled trades. The proportion of unskilled and underpaid labor enrolled in the unions has always been very small, and it shows very little tendency to increase. Effective organization requires time, patience, and considerable financial resources, the very things which underpaid labor lacks. Not within a generation would organization be able to obtain living wages for more than a small minority of those who are below that level.

THE ONE SOLUTION IS MINIMUM WAGE LEGISLATION

The one device that gives promise of making the living wage universal is a minimum fixed by law. This means that the public authorities, State or Federal or both, should enact legislation forbidding any employer to pay less than the equivalent of a decent livelihood. We have not the space to discuss this project in either its ethical, political, or economic aspects, nor to present at length the results of its operation where it has been tried. We must content ourselves with the statement that it now seems to be favored by the majority of economists, and vindicated by the experience of Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Oregon, Washington, Utah, and Massachusetts. None of

these communities shows any desire or intention of repealing its minimum wage laws.

In concluding this series of short papers, the writer wishes to set down the conviction that has been growing stronger in his mind for many years; namely, that the living wage question is by far the most important industrial question of our time. Ultimately, we may hope for a regime of not merely living wages but completely just wages, or even for a system of co-operative production where the majority of the workers will be partial or exclusive owners of the tools that they use; but the most practical reform for the immediate future is the establishment of living wages for all workers.

"THE REALITY IN RELIGION"

In its issue of March 3 The New York Times says editorially: "The literature of the war bears abundant witness to the hunger of the man at the front for real religion. He is face to face with naked life. The trenches will not tolerate pretense. He knows little of nice theological definitions; he is suspicious about dogma; he has no patience with ecclesiastical controversy, but he clings passionately and tenaciously to religious realities."

In this excerpt dogma and religious realities are contrasted; the soldier is suspicious of dogma but clings to religious realities. But what are religious realities if not the truths regarding man's relation to God? And these truths, as made known to us by divine revelation are dogmas. Dogmas are the objective realities of religion: that there is One God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Creator and final Judge, to award eternal reward or punishment, of every man; that the soul is immortal, dependent for its salvation on the Saviour Jesus Christ; that this life is the time of probation during which the irrevocable decision must be made, and so forth. These are the objective realities of religion, intended to become subjective realities by being lived up to. Neither mere objective religion will save a man, because it has not been made his own, nor mere subjective religion, because it is not religion.

No doubt the experiences of the battlefield are calculated to turn the mind of the soldier to the objective realities of religion and to prepare his soul for their practical acceptance. But in each case it will be halfhearted dogma may lie dormant or half-realized in his soul, maybe as a memory of earlier days, that will start the change. The crack of doom surrounding him will make him think of God, and eternity, and his sin, and his need of mercy and salvation. Were there no dogma, how ever hidden in the depth of his soul, there would be no basis for his earnest prayer.

The reality of religion, then, in its whole extent, implies two things: God stretching out His Hand and man grasping it. God gives His truth and power, man believes His every word and strengthened by His power accomplishes His will. Prayer and the Sacraments are the sources of strength. If we believe in the saving power of good works they are

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such works as are done by the grace of God; they are the fruits and branches growing on the vine which is Christ.

We readily believe that soldiers in the trenches "have no patience with ecclesiastical controversy." That is not the kind of fight they have on hand. The Protestant sees the Catholic braving death with manly courage, the Catholic finds the Protestant equally ready to die for duty's sake; between two such comrades there can be no present feud about religion. We do not wish to imply that all religions are equally good and that religious controversy is always out of place. But Catholic and non-Catholic can respect each other's good faith, and certainly need not wrangle about their differences in the trenches.

Alas! that we have not a little more of that spirit behind the trenches! It is a sad thing that just at this time, when so much is at stake and our country needs our combined devotion, we can not be more conciliatory. Several papers that come under our eyes are amazingly full of harshness. And it is always the Catholic Church that is being found fault with. When we strike the controversial note it is nearly always in self defense. From the multiplied humiliations which the Church is now undergoing one is prone to conclude that a great triumph is in store for her—an Easter after a good Friday—and that she is being prepared for the day of her glory. For in the supernatural order abasement is the ordinary preamble to exaltation.—S. in the Guardian.

Life is not so short but that there is always time for courtesy.—Emerson.

Cardinal Biletti has succeeded the late Cardinal Serafini as protector of the American College, Rome.

Silence kept in a spirit of devotion brings great solace to the suffering souls. There are few who do not sin by the tongue, and purgatory is filled with souls who suffer for having given that member too much liberty.

The surest way not to fail is to determine to succeed.—Sheridan.

Late repentance is seldom true, but true repentance is never too late.—P. Vening.

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