

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

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

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAS

"There hath stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not." (John I. 26.)

The prophets had foretold and partially described the Messiah that was to come. But was it not most appropriate that the most explicit testimony of Him and revelation of His character should be given us by and through means of the Baptist? Therefore we find in Advent that St. John is brought before us in the gospels. His preaching, his works had led men to think that he himself was perhaps the Messiah. But "he confessed, I am not the Christ," to the priests and levites, who had been sent to question him. "And the next day," says the gospel, "John saw Jesus coming to him and he said: Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world." "And John gave testimony, saying: I saw the Spirit coming down as a dove from heaven, and He remained upon Him. . . . and I saw and gave testimony that this is the Son of God" (John I.).

Moreover, the Baptist later on, when cast into prison by Herod, sent two of his disciples to our Lord, and by his questions caused our Blessed Lord to reveal Himself openly to us—the character and description of our divine Lord given us by Himself! What excuse can man have not to know Him; and knowing Him, not to love Him and follow Him? John's disciples gave his message, "Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another?" "And Jesus making answer, said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me" (Matt. xi. 3.). Thus the Baptist drew from Christ the description of the character by which He would be known by man. The God of Truth made Man gave testimony of Himself.

How blessed are we, preparing to celebrate the anniversary of the coming of that divine Redeemer, to look upon Him portrayed so clearly by His own Blessed Self! As in those days, so now, there are countless ones that need Him. And He comes to us with the same benevolence, the same readiness, the same power to do us good. Have we not ourselves been amongst the words, and have we not ourselves felt the divine touch of His mercy? Perhaps we were blind, and He opened our eyes to the Faith! We may have been lying helpless on the road to heaven, powerless to proceed, and the lame have been made to walk. Lepers in sin, more than once—yea, many a time—have we been cleansed and forgiven. Alas! perhaps for years, our souls, dead to God through sinful habits, have been raised to life again by His grace. And our hard, laborious lives have been sweetened and filled with hope of eternal joy in heaven, because we poor have had the gospel preached to us.

It is well for us to realize this merciful character of the Saviour. It was not always thus. Formerly, under the old Law, the Almighty was the God of justice. His wrath flamed out; His vengeance overtook the wicked. But now with the coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, how different! And this is why the Baptist gave testimony of Him and our Lord revealed Himself, so that no one could mistake the object of His coming, and no one feel that he was too utter an outcast not to be forgiven.

Then why did the Redeemer thus come, filled with compassion, ready and longing to befriend and forgive? Becoming Man Himself, He wished to be one with us, to dwell amongst us, to share our sorrows, to take upon Himself our sins and miseries: for He remembered that we were but the dust of the earth—poor, weak, and helpless creatures. He had in His mercy created us for Himself, and He came to restore us, to re-establish us, that we once again might be "the sons of God and heirs with Christ." He is the Saviour, who "loves the souls of men."

And again, he came pitying us, ready to help us, for He knew the enemies that would plot our ruin. He could not leave us helpless amidst such perils. It was through spite and hatred against Himself that the devil would never cease from trying to work our ruin. The envy of the evil one is our constant danger. Envy because the Redeemer came to raise us up and fit us for the thrones left empty by the fallen angels. To know that we are meant through the Redemption of Christ to reign in glory, whilst the fallen spirits pine in the abyss of misery, is the cause of the enmity, which can never cease, between the devils and the souls of men.

The Blessed Redeemer came to do all that even an Almighty and loving God could do to save poor mankind from eternal death. He came "to save His people from their sins." Will it not, then, be all our own sad, miserable fault if the evil one prevails against us? Shall we not, then, welcome Him at this holy time, and offer Him loyalty and loving obedience? Trust in His goodness, for He came "to seek and to save that which was lost."

IS THE CHURCH BEHIND THE TIMES?

The opponents of Catholicism, broadly speaking, belong to two classes. We have, in the first place, the common or garden Protestant sectarian, who will tell you that the Catholic Church receives payment for the forgiving of sins; that she discourages the reading of the Bible; that her claims are unscriptural; that she pays divine honors to the Blessed Virgin, and even to the Pope. The second class is of those intelligent, broad-minded, well-meaning non-Catholics in whose eyes the Church stands impeached as the enemy of progress and advancement of science. They will admit an admiration of the Church in many ways, and will concede that of all the Christian bodies she is the most entitled to respect. But there remains the rooted conviction that the Church suspects and fears science, and that knowledge cannot exist side by side with acceptance of her claims, and that consequently it is in her interests to discourage investigation and disparage the achievements of scientific research.

While we are justified in dismissing as an ignoramus the ordinary Protestant bigot, to whom we feel that we have done justice if we have suggested the investing of a penny in a child's catechism; this second class of opponent deserves to be taken more seriously.

We must admit that the spectacle of a Church claiming divine authority to teach infallibly, guarding with almost divine fierceness the deposit of faith, refusing to compromise with the greatest of the world's powers when it is a question of the divine truths committed to her care, and hurling her defiance at false science, will be ever a source of bewilderment and annoyance to the world. Between her and science with its pretentious claims there will always be clash, though there can never be conflict in the nature of things between natural and supernatural truth. St. Paul gloried in the fact that the Gospel he preached was not in accordance with "the wisdom of the Greeks."

Again, when men of learning, who find themselves opposed to the claims of the Church, are confronted with the fact that many of the great leaders of science like Copernicus, Pasteur, Ampere and a host of others were devoted Catholics, they will answer that these men won their place not because but in spite of the authority of the Church, for freedom of investigation has never been allowed when science has clashed with the accepted doctrines of the Church or the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures. In fine the Church is behind the times, and her very claims make it impossible for her to take her place in the progress of the future.

Now it is because our objectors fail to distinguish between true and false science that they ridicule what they call the conservatism of the Church. Between the dogmas of the faith and the established conclusions of science there is not and never can be any conflict. Science occupies itself with ascertained facts, their classification and verification. Observation is the basis of science. From the facts thus ascertained and verified are drawn deductions which are called the "laws of nature." Whatever trouble and discord have arisen are due to the intruding of science into the domain of philosophy and religion. It is not the business of science to tell us the origin of man or of the universe, for science deals only with ascertained facts and their immediate causes. If, for instance, having ascertained that there is a certain evolution among given species of plants or animals, the scientist jumps to the conclusion that the whole universe is the outcome of a process of evolution, then he has left the field of science, that of observation and experiment, and has entered that of philosophy, and has thus come into conflict with revealed religion.

Secondly, our opponents do not appreciate the difference between investigation and teaching. Catholics are never denied freedom to investigate; they may be denied freedom to teach as true and proven what is really only surmise. True progress in science consists in the discovery and proof of facts; false science consists in the preaching as facts what are only theories.

Their theories may subsequently be proven to be true in fact, but until they are thus proven the Church has the right, where faith and tradition are involved, to oppose their being taught as facts. How often has it happened that theories are given to the world, have spread like wild-fire, and afterwards, when calm study and judgment have had time to do their work, have been abandoned! The deplorable thing is that these theories and half truths often work havoc with the religious faith of the unwary. The study of biology, anthropology and geology abounds with instances of this nature. Biblical criticism above all has suffered in this way, and though the Church may seem to invite the taunt that she is "behind the times," she prefers to wait for substantial proof. That her wisdom in waiting for solid proof of the new before giving up the old performs a useful service to science itself ought to be evident.—Southern Cross.

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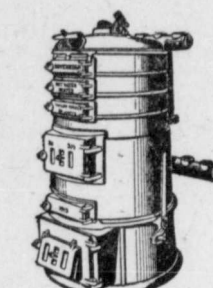
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