

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOU, D. D.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

HEEDING THE INVITATION

"A certain man made a great supper, and invited many. And he sent his servant, at the hour of supper, to say to them that were invited that they should come, for now all things are ready." (Luke xiv, 15, 16.)

The Lord is reasonable in His demands—yes, reasonable to the extent of generosity. He never asks of us anything except for which He intends to pay us a hundredfold. We can not, in fact, offer Him an act or a gift that could be fully gratuitous. It may appear to be so on our part, but on His part it is not. Even a little cup of water given in His name will have a reward. His goodness will not permit Him to be a receiver only—He must recompense us for every gift and deed given and done for Him or in His name.

From this fact we should learn the beauty of God's orders and the sweetness of His invitations. We should notice how in His parables, as the one in today's Gospel, He invites us, not to labor and toil, but to come to a pleasant task or duty. The sternness of His voice is never known, save when we remain deaf to His call and neglect our duty as children of a generous Father. He wishes us to realize well that our subjection to Him is not as that of slaves to their master. We are more than slaves, even in our littleness compared with His greatness. We are His children and His friends. His superiority in His relations with us is fatherly only, until we absolutely refuse to acknowledge Him. Reason will tell us that when we refuse to heed His kind voice and gracious invitations, He can not any longer treat us as good, obedient children.

It is practically incomprehensible why people in such great numbers are deaf to God's pleading summons. He lays out a feast for them, and asks them to come and be His guests, but they seek elsewhere for their pleasures and delights. Of course, such people follow the desires of their bodies, and allow this lower part of them to rule the higher. But the mystery is that this is so. The body is their rebellious part; it aches, it pains, it causes suffering, it is ever in danger of losing its life. Really, it makes a slave of each one of us, to some extent, when considered alone. Why do we, then, give it everything it desires? Such indulgence gives us but weary days and sleepless nights afterwards, and brings us to an early grave. It can not lift us up toward higher things, for it is above its power to do so.

The soul should listen to God and draw the body after it in His service. We are like unto God in our soul, why not live in union with Him by it? It is this noble part of us that lifts us up and carries us to Him who is the source of its life, its beauty, and its strength. To God we can go in no other way except by our soul. In the hereafter the body will follow the soul, but the soul never can follow the body. The body may drag it, in a certain sense, in its train on earth; but in the world beyond the body will not hold sway. When God beckons to us, as He does incessantly, it is to our soul, intending that our body shall accompany it joyfully. If the body rebels, He expects us to conquer it, and He does not ask us to do this unaided. He provides us with most powerful assistance—His grace. In fact, every summons from God is to come and be armed with His grace.

God sends many messengers out into the highways and byways to search for us, and to extend His kind invitations. In this Gospel, from the parable we see how He sent His servants to call all those who were invited, to come and partake of the feast. By means of His Church, His kingdom on earth, He intends to have His voice reach all men, to tell them of His calling for them and of the feast which is prepared for those who answer. The Church is really His servant and messenger of today. He is not calling men directly by the sound of His voice, but His invitation is echoed through the authorities and ministers in His Church. She has a grand commission, yet one of the most responsible that could be given to any organization. She is safe herself, for she has His assistance; but the sad words of refusal to accept this invitation are ringing ever in her ears. As she goes out to call men to the great feast, she meets with insults and rebuffs, or finds them showing little or no interest in her invitation. And she is sorrowful, not so much because they refuse to listen to her, but because the consequences to themselves will be the saddest. As a kind, loving mother, she must weep as she sees her children, or those who should be her children, refusing to accept her maternal protection.

The invitations of the Lord are being given to us unceasingly. Can we find any fault with them? Why are we so slow to answer them? Can the world offer us anything that will compare, even in the least way, with God's eternal reward and the perpetual banquet of His delights? We know we are not energetic in responding to His calls. How many times have we turned a deaf ear to them, when advantages and opportunities without number were at our disposal? Is this to last all through life? If so, what

may we expect after it shall be over?

There are many who are afraid that they are giving too much to God, and they search for an excuse for their conduct. Sometimes their means are too limited to help the Church and her pastors in a material way, or they will say that the richer brethren should care for the temporal needs of the Church. Again, it will be fatigue, or loss of time that could profit them in a material way, that ever-lasting tolling for the things they must leave behind. Others will see faults in the Church, or will pretend to notice deficiencies in her system and her methods. This objection is common among men who are associated with large business enterprises. Their ideas, they think, should be the guiding rules for the Church. There is another class who think that, if they show their Catholicity very markedly, their prejudiced neighbors will turn more against them, or endeavor to boycott them in business. The remark is often heard that, as Catholics, their business can never be much, or that it is hard for a Catholic to do business.

We need not say that all this is false. There are few so perverse as to consider well guided religion in another a fault. These critics and fault-finders and others inclined to lament, should remember that, if they are sincerely religious, they are doing nothing more than responding to the calling voice of God, who is inviting them to where the banquet is set and where their joy will be full. If they answer the call of God's enemies—and they are all those who hate their neighbor because of his religion or for any other reason—they will quickly be deprived of real happiness even on earth. To give to the Lord is but to lend to Him; to give to man separated from God is to squander.

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ON BEING SURE

(By Rev. H. G. Hughes)

How many years ago it was I do not like to think; but, despite the distance of time, I have a vivid remembrance of the day and the hour when the first glimmerings of light played upon my darkened soul, and showed me, faint at first and vague in outline, the majestic form of the Holy Catholic Church as the divinely appointed teacher of mankind, the glorious City of Truth.

Long had I wandered in the gloom and mists of doubt, while now one thin phantom of truth, now another, loomed up in the darkness and drew my hopeful attention, only to dissolve in vapor and prove itself unsubstantial as the darkness itself in which I walked. For some years of happy ignorance, Anglicanism, decked out in imitation garments, was not quite an easy fit nor always of the correct size, held my loyal fealty, masquerading as the Church of Christ and pillar and ground of the truth.

THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND But I found at last that my Anglican teachers were not sure; they were not sure of their own beliefs. This uncertainty was veiled, indeed, by Catholic sounding phrases, spoken *ore rotundo* from the pulpit and reiterated in the press, but when one came to prove by questions and ask for light on the correct bottom was found to be very near the top, and the light was not forthcoming.

One good man, a great promoter of "non-communicating attendance," which in those days was the euphemism (a kind of "discipline of the secret") for Mass, told me that he believed in Transubstantiation, but wasn't so absolutely sure of it as to consider it his duty, if called upon, to go to the stake for that doctrine. It was the same regarding confession. To go to confession was the proper thing; but was it strictly necessary as the means of pardon after grievous sin? Neither preaching nor practice seemed to afford any sure answer to this awkward question.

The end for me as an Anglican came when I left home for a low Church place, where I heard every Catholic doctrine that had been taught me to them, when advantages and opportunities without number were at our disposal? Is this to last all through life? If so, what

Establishment to which my former instructors belonged. I was naturally astonished but I did not grasp the true inwardness of the phenomenon. I concluded, with the youthful habit of rushing to extremes, that there was no teaching authority on earth, and that I had to worry out my religion for myself.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH

After some years of chasing various will-o'-the-wisps, or, to resume my former metaphor, various phantoms of truth, I met a Catholic layman, a recent and enthusiastic convert to the Faith. He as I, is now in middle age, and he has seen long years of service in the picked army of St. Ignatius of Loyola. His enthusiasm has in no way abated. Meeting him again after many decades I was reminded of that far off meeting when he pointed me the way to being sure of religious truth.

After so long a time spent in possession of this rich and precious gift of sureness in that matter of which above all things we need to be sure, it is a wonder to me that so many can settle down comfortably in their state of vague uncertainty about the great affair of religion. People will profess the utmost surety of conviction concerning many things of which, in truth, it is next to impossible to be really certain and about which uncertainty does not carry with it any irremediable consequences; but in the one thing in which being sure is of imperative necessity and uncertainty may spell the loss of their souls, they not only do not seem to mind, but even make a boast of ignorance.

The noble thing, we are told, is not the finding of the truth, but the seeking for it. One could understand this if there were held out some hope of finding truth at the end of the search; but that consummation is not to be arrived at in this life. We are to come to the goal of eternal felicity to which truth alone can point the way without knowing what that truth is! Of all inconsistencies could there be one more foolishly unhappy.

THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY

Doubtless different aspects of the Church appeal to different minds when her claims first come before them; but it has always seemed to me that her uncompromising claim to know the truth and to demand acceptance of her teaching as the word of God should make the most universal appeal. Like her divine Master, she speaks with authority, and not as the scribes and pharisees. This does, in fact, impress many. It is obvious and often remarked by those not of the fold that the Catholic Church "knows her own mind."

To the writer, in the far off days of searching, the absolute assurance of his convert friend came as a revelation, and led to the recognition of the Church as the authorized Teacher of the truth of God. We walked under a cloudless summer sky and discussed religion as young fellows so often do. A certain Catholic doctrine which had always seemed to my ignorance to imply unwarrantable assumptions on the part of those who believed it, came into the conversation. "How can you be so cocksure about a thing like that?" I irreverently and in elegantly asked? "How can you possibly know its true?" "I am as sure it is true," was the reply, "as I am that the sun is shining in that sky above us." And how do you know it is true?" I demanded. "Because the church teaches it," my friend answered.

It was very simple; it sounds almost banal when one tells it; but to a mind that had had no conception of the possibility of real, confident certitude in religious matters, this reply opened a new world—the world of truth; not of truth for ever elusive, but of truth attainable; a world in which one could be sure beyond doubt or fear.

TEACHERS AND TAUGHT

Of the one thing of which it is imperative to be sure, men can be sure if they will. The natural man calls out for the truth about God and about himself, his origin, and his destiny; the light of conscience itself leads him on the path of truth yet he turns aside after his own vain imaginings. He dislikes being taught with authority, though at the same time he admits that a religious teacher ought to have authority and teach with authority. Strange inconsistency; due to human pride!

So he strives to find a way by which he may seem to be taught and yet judge his teacher. He takes the Bible, and uses his private judgment upon it; or he takes an imaginary Church, the "undivided" Church of a remote antiquity, and uses his private judgment as to what she taught when she "spoke with one voice." In practice, of course, the ordinary person must take his religion from others who profess to be able to teach him. But the teachers are not sure, so the taught cannot be sure; and both got so used to not being sure that they have come to look upon that as the proper and normal state of mankind here below. Yet the truth is mighty, and will prevail. There are signs that our fellow-countrymen are less content than formerly with uncertainty in religion. Eager crowds listen to our preachers and lecturers in streets and parks, and it is coming home to many how blessed a thing it is to be sure, and dawning upon not a few that after all they can be sure if they will.—Universe.

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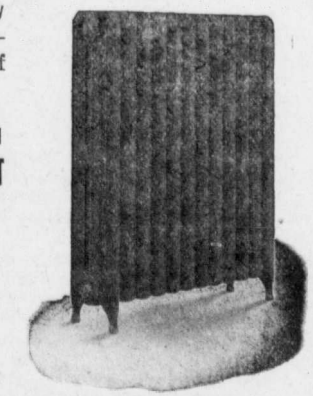
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