

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

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

OUR LADY'S SHARE IN THE PASSION

"There stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother." (John xix. 25.)

The subject, my dear brethren, of Our Lady's share in the Passion of her Divine Son is one to which justice can never be done. How can poor weak words of man picture to us that Mother's grief? But, my dear brethren; Our Lady does not ask for learning or eloquence; a tear, a sigh, an act of sorrow, would please her far more.

And first notice the altogether different position of our Blessed Lady as regards the Passion to that which we and all mankind occupy. She differs from us, because she had never sinned. Sin brought misery and death into the world, and her Divine Son took upon Himself the iniquities of us all. After that, how could the immaculate one refuse to suffer? Not for her own sins, because they were none; but for ours, and to be like her Son, did Mary suffer.

In one other respect, likewise, was Mary totally different from us. The Victim sacrificed was hers. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was most truly the Son of the Virgin Mary. And it was demanded of His Mother to give Him up, to allow Him to be sacrificed for the redemption of the world. And freely she gave of her own, her Divine Son, to be put to death for sin.

With this in mind—that Mary had never sinned, that the Victim sacrificed was hers—let us briefly review the share she took in the Passion of our Lord. In the devotion of the Stations of the Cross, the fourth station, "The Meeting of the Son and His Blessed Mother," is not the least touching. In spirit let us draw near to her. The dreadful night of the betrayal has passed; news had been brought to her from time to time of the apprehension of Jesus, His being dragged before the high-priests, their insults and their cruelty. What a night of mental torture! Tradition tells us that blessed Peter had found his way to her, sobbing out his sin and his sorrow that He had denied his Master. Perhaps from a distance Our Lady may have witnessed the scourging; there can be little doubt but that she heard those dreadful words, "Let Him be crucified," "His blood be upon us and upon our children." (Matt. xxvii., 23, 25.)

And when the fatal procession was formed, and Jesus came forth bearing His cross, His Mother met Him. Was it to bid farewell? No, rather to bid Him go forth to be crucified for us poor sinners; to strengthen Him in beholding one faithful heart, the immaculate heart, bearing Him company in His sufferings. She bravely followed those blessed footsteps up to Calvary. What a debt of gratitude we owe this Mother of Sorrows!

When Calvary had been reached, and the cruel work of the Crucifixion completed, and the Saviour was left to die in agony, St. John tells us, "There stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother." The cross was Mary's altar, and the Victim was prepared for sacrifice. Abraham's hand was stayed when, obedient to God, he was about to sacrifice his son. But no merciful intervention took place on Calvary. Mary acquiesced in God's most holy Will decreeing the death of her Son. Whom she joined in offering Himself for the redemption of the world. Mary gave up her Son Jesus and took us instead. Blessed be the compassion of that Holy Mother!

And when our Lord had died, they took down the dead body, and laid it in her arms. Then had Mary silent leisure to see the cruel work of mortal sin. Counting each wound as she washed it and tended it, she recounted to her soul afresh the sufferings of her Son. Let us pray her for a share in that sorrow, for our sins had caused those wounds and her unspeakable grief.

Yet there was a comfort even in this sorrow of laying out the body of Jesus. She had Him with her yet. And she had to be deprived of this sad comfort, hurried over her farewell, "For it was the day of the Parosceve, and the Sabbath drew on." (Luke xxiii., 54.)

When the sacred body of our Lord had been placed in the sepulchre, and the stone rolled to the doorway, who shall describe the loneliness and the desolation of His mother Mary? All was gone! The light of the world had gone out. But yet the brave Mother's heart did not give way. For the grand faith was alive in that heart—sinners have been forgiven, their iniquities expiated, the great work of redemption accomplished.

Our Blessed Lady, even in her bitterest hour of trial, never begrudged the cost of our salvation. Her own interior martyrdom and the countless sufferings of her Son she lovingly offered to us. Our Saviour had lovingly taken on Himself to die for us; His mother had to imitate Him in His mercy and share with Him in His Passion and Death for our sakes. This we have seen she did unsparingly, lovingly, faithfully. But there is one thing that she asks, that she looks for, that she fully expects—our love. Yes, she claims our love both for her Son and for herself—for both, for love of one could not be separated from the other. Who has ever claimed our love and devotion so touchingly as the Son and the Mother from the cross of Calvary?

The Son on the cross, the Mother by it. Our sins caused those sufferings, our repentance must make amends. And endeavoring to keep out of sin for the future, submission to the holy Will of God and uniting all we do and suffer to the sufferings of Jesus and Mary, is the practical love that Mary claims. To gain such love Jesus and Mary are glad that they suffered. May we be faithful in that love, day after day; may they accept it and bless it, and hereafter reward it in the life to come!

PAPAL LETTER

NAMING ST. BERNARD PATRON OF CLIMBERS

By Mr. Enrico Pucci

On the occasion of the celebration at Annecy of the millenium of St. Bernard of Mentone, Pope Pius sent to the Right Rev. Florentin Du Bois de la Villere, Bishop of Annecy, in whose diocese are situated the hospices conducted by the monks, the following letter concerning the life and work of St. Bernard and the active charity of his sons in protecting Alpine travelers:

"Venerable Brother,

"Health and Apostolic Benediction.

"You will understand how pleased We were to hear of your intention to celebrate with piety and holy joy the memory of St. Bernard. Because of the honor that he has given the name of Christian. We have long had a special devotion to him, and now that We have been raised to the Chair of St. Peter, We eagerly seize upon the opportunity to use Our authority to add luster to his glory. In former days when upon occasion We were accustomed to go mountain climbing, as to renew our strength and rest Our mind after the strain of study, We often frequented those places, where, as in a great arena, the industrious charity of St. Bernard lies before one. The very view inspired Us with love and admiration for this great man who left there such deep traces of his life that it can be said something of him still breathes there. Surely everyone knows how wonderful he must have been when the gratitude of posterity consecrated his immortal name to those huge peaks of the Alps.

A GREAT HERO OF THE CHURCH

"It is unfortunate that due to neglect and the disturbances of the past there should remain with us only a few reliable traditions about his life, and that his biographers did not keep scrupulously faithful to history. What is known, however, shows that St. Bernard was worthy of being numbered among the greatest heroes of the Catholic Church. Born in the famous city of Mentone amidst surroundings filled with such things that cause worldly friends to consider these perfectly happy who possess them in abundance, he soon placed all these things behind him for the love of the crucified Christ. After his education was completed and while his father was arranging a suitable marriage for him, he suddenly left his home, and over rough and stony by-paths walked to Aosta. He was kindly received by Peter, Archdeacon of the church in Aosta, under whose direction he prepared himself for the priesthood. Already his marvelous virtues were beginning to be known. He practiced such penance that, considering them delicacies, he discarded even brown bread and spring water, and took only food and drink that was so unpalatable that he scarcely enough to sustain life. Rejecting his body thus into slavery he dedicated all the energies of his soul to preaching the word of God, first as Canon of Aosta, and then for the remaining forty years and more of his life as Archdeacon. When he saw that the people of neighboring districts were ignorant of their faith and led a corrupt and barbarous life and that even some of them through contact with the Saracens were practicing impious heathen rites and foolish superstitions, he did not allow his burning zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls to restrain itself within the limits of the diocese of Aosta, but toiled most fruitfully in the dioceses also of Slon, Geneva and Tarentaise, and extended his apostolate even to Ivrea and Novara. Traveling through those valleys and mountains he labored with such results that he drew men from error to truth, from the filth of vice to the dignity of a Christian life and gained the title of Apostle of the Alps.

TRIBUTE OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

"Such bright rays of virtue, however, other saints, and indeed many of them, possess. But St. Bernard has a special prerogative which becomes almost the specific character of his holiness. Of it that other ornament of the diocese of Annecy, St. Francis de Sales, writes in his Theotime: 'There are several degrees of perfection in charity. To lend something to the poor when they are not in extreme want is the last degree of charity; greater is it to give away all that you have; even greater is it to dedicate oneself to the care of the poor. Thus to be hospitable when there is no extreme necessity is merely something that is advised, and its first fruit is to house wayfarers. To go to the corners of the highways and invite them in, as we know Abraham did, is a higher degree of

perfection. But it is still a higher degree of perfection to dwell in dangerous places and there greet and help and feed the passing travelers. It was in this that St. Bernard of Mentone, that celebrated personality of this diocese, excelled. Born of a good family he lived for many years on the highest summits of the Alps. There he gathered many companions about him to help in every way possible the travelers who passed that way and receive them in their hospices. Often at the peril of their own lives and while great storms were raging they rescued the travelers, many of whom would have fallen victims to the mountain blizzards and cold had there not been hospices established by that lover of God upon these two mountains which bear his name. (Book II, Chap. ix.)

"It is not so long now since the genius of the human mind first pierced these mountains and built tunnels through them and opened up safe and easy means of communication between peoples. But during the long centuries before, the only way to cross the mountains was through the dangerous passes which lie between their peaks. The best known was that of the Pennine Alps by way of the summit of Mount Jove. Through it great armies passed often from one side to the other. To obtain protection for their legions in this dangerous place, the Romans had built to their chief god a temple, only a trace of which or of its outlying buildings which were used for the shelter and defense of the imperial envoys, remains today. But for a long time Satan held these gates of Italy and controlled them. For an interval he lost them only to regain them again, and if finally he had to abandon them altogether, it was due to St. Bernard. There can be no doubt that it was St. Bernard who forced the Saracens to abandon these territories which they had occupied—territories which they had ruined by their robberies and their sorries, and the people of which they had contaminated through the practice of idolatry. Every stain of paganism he removed through the practice of his extraordinary virtues.

"An undertaking which St. Bernard later planned and carried out deserves still greater praise. He did not deem it enough merely to remove the image and ministers of Satan from that locality or from the Graian Alps at Columna Jovis, the gateway from France into Italy. For, after raising above the ruins of the temple the triumphant Cross of Jesus Christ, he wanted it kept safely there by chosen soldiers of the will by battling against all the commandment of their master to do good to others, should watch without ceasing for the safety of the travelers through the Alps. St. Bernard thought out the plan and executed it and thanks to him there arose upon some of the highest parts of the earth's surface two lasting monuments of Christian charity which can never receive the praise they deserve. When one studies closely the motives which inspired St. Bernard to attempt an undertaking which we will not call rash but which seems to have stood above human powers, and then when he sees how it was crowned with success, one will be forced to recognize that here was the hand of God.

THE GLORY OF A GREAT SAINT

"Powerful leaders aiming to conquer and occupy some of the most flourishing districts of Europe could lead their huge armies across their Alpine passes.

They could boldly advance through the great snow-covered solitudes. They could stave the white snow with blood and think nothing of the dead and dying they left behind. But was one ever found gifted with so generous a soul as to impose upon himself and his followers the obligation of remaining there and of exposing themselves daily to the danger of death to save the passersby from starvation, cold and exhaustion? To have conceived this plan and carried it out is to the everlasting glory of St. Bernard of Mentone. The hospice which he built has stood now for nearly nine hundred years. He built it strong and plain, and it stands there as a monument to the toil and sacrifices and the unconquerable virtue of centuries.

"Who can enumerate the benefits which the sons of St. Bernard have bestowed during the course of the centuries upon men of every race and religion? How much assistance must they have given in times of crisis and danger! How many unhappy sufferers must they have snatched from the jaws of death! How they must have aided the intercourse of peoples by safeguarding the journeys through the Alps! Their courtesy, the promptness and solicitude with which they greet their guests and care for them,—a kindness which We ourselves have experienced more than once,—assists greatly in breaking down the prejudices fostered against the Catholic Church and draws them toward her as the inspiration of such glorious charity. We are therefore especially pleased to congratulate Our beloved sons, the Augustinian Canons Regular and their superior who preserve inviolate the spirit of St. Bernard and still dwell in that ancient home and stronghold of Christian charity, aided by their St. Bernard dogs which they have trained to follow the footsteps of travelers, and to be ever ready to rescue the stricken.

"We are aware that recently there has arisen some uncertainty about the year of St. Bernard's death. Leaving this question to one side, We are very happy, Venerable Brother, to join with you in the celebration of the millenium of his birth according to the ordinary reckoning, especially as his is also the eightieth year since the Bishop of Novara, where St. Bernard died, paid high honors to St. Bernard according to the customs of the period. That celebration was ratified by the Holy See, and We think that this fact should be commemorated during the present festivities.

MADE PATRON OF ALL CLIMBERS

"Availing Ourselves therefore of this solemn occasion and wishing to intensify the veneration in which so great a man is held, a veneration which has been strong and continuous among the peoples of the Alps from the very beginning, We in the fullness of Our Apostolic authority, do proclaim St. Bernard of Mentone the patron not only of the Alpine inhabitants and travelers, but also of all those who follow the Alpine climbing for physical exercise. Among all the physical exercises which are taken as honest recreation, none is better for mind and body, if practiced without rashness. While climbing in search of lighter and purer air, the strength of the body is renewed and increased, the will by battling against all sorts of difficulties becomes fit to wrestle with the duties and hardships of

life, and by contemplating the immensity and beauty of the things of nature which extend before the gaze of him who stands upon the Alpine heights, the mind rises quickly to God, the Creator and Lord of nature.

"Finally, so as to increase the splendor and the fruits of this solemnity, We are very glad to extend to all those who take part in the triduum in honor of St. Bernard the privilege of gaining a Plenary Indulgence on the usual conditions. To the one who will celebrate the Pontifical Mass on the last day of the triduum, We give the right to impart the Papal Benediction to all those present and a Plenary Indulgence. Meanwhile, as a pledge of Our special benevolence to you, Venerable Brother, to your clergy and people and especially to the family of the Counts of Mentone, We extend with all the warmth of Our heart as a sign of heavenly grace, the Apostolic Benediction.

"Given in Rome at St. Peter's on August 20, 1923, the second year of Our Pontificate. Pius XI."

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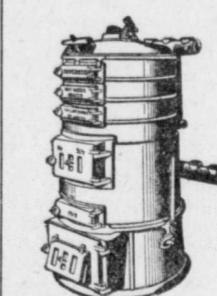
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