

FIVE-MINUTE SERMONS FOR EARLY MASSES.

BY THE PAULIST FATHERS. Preached in their Church of St. Paul the Apostle, Fifth Street and Ninth Avenue, New York City.

New York Catholic Review. Tenth Sunday after Pentecost. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Gospel of the Sunday.)

These are very familiar words, my brethren; they are brought to our attention nearly every year on this Sunday, and perhaps a good many other times besides. No doubt we think we know nearly all that is in them, or that can be got out of them, by this time.

Perhaps we do; but this may be doubted. Still, I have no doubt that you have all heard them very well explained quite often, and if you have remembered all you heard, and thought about it a good deal yourselves, this little sermon may be quite superfluous to you. Nevertheless you might humble yourselves by listening to it; and if you do, surely you will get some share of the promise which the words contain, whether you learn anything new about them or not.

Let us consider them, then, for these few minutes. Suppose I were to ask you what is meant by the first part of them, "he that exalteth himself shall be humbled," what would you say? Probably you would answer "that is plain enough; it is that one who brags of what he is or what he can do is displeased; he would be thought a good deal more of if he would just show what good points he has by actual work instead of talking about them. Moreover, one who pretends to be more than he is, is pretty sure to be found out some time when he is put to the test; then, even if people have believed him before, he will have to step down from the place he has claimed to take the lowest seat, instead of the highest, which he had been trying to occupy, as our Lord puts it in this parable, in another place."

Well this is true, at least in many cases. Still we must confess after all that a man is often taken pretty nearly at his own valuation in this world; if he wants to succeed, he must put himself forward. Some discount may be made on the advertisement one makes of one's own wares; still, they sell better than those of one who does not advertise at all. No doubt one may lose by boasting too much; but also it is quite plain that one may be too modest, and lose perhaps more that way.

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," perhaps he may sometimes be generally humbling oneself is hardly a success. But you will say, "These words of our Lord do not refer to mere worldly matters. It is one who pretends to be better off than he really is, spiritually rather than temporarily, that is meant by 'one that exalteth himself.' One who is like this Pharisee, trusting in himself for his just or holy, and despising others for their wickedness; not one who boasts of his wealth, strength, or natural ability."

I think that in this you are quite right. Still, hypocrites, and a good many others who are not just that, but are fairly good people, though not so good as they think they are, get along pretty well through life, and hold up their heads in the church and in the community generally, without getting humbled in any very notable way. And the really good and humble Christians who make no parade of virtue at all, are very often, and indeed generally, not found out; it is only those who know them very well indeed, that know them very much of them. So they do not seem to be much exalted; at any rate, not by the world at large.

And then there is another difficulty. The fact is, that these humble and retiring good Christians do not want to be exalted. There are, perhaps, some people who go round saying that they are miserable sinners, hoping that somebody will say that they are much mistaken; that they are not sinners at all, but great saints. But these are not the kind of people we are talking about. The real saint is really humble, and the really humble man does not want to be praised, flattered, or even thought highly of.

Well, then, what does our Lord's promise amount to? It would seem that the proud do get the humbling which is promised to them; and the humble don't get much praise or exaltation of any kind, and wouldn't want it if they could get it.

In not there, then, something else which our Saviour meant by this promise, and which is also fulfilled? "He that exalteth himself shall be humbled." He that tries to acquire virtue without humility, and that thinks he has got a good deal of it already, and is pretty well on the way to be a saint; or such a one will find his mistake sooner or later; on the day of his death, if not before, the whole structure of false sanctity which he has built up will fall to pieces like a house of cards and he will be humbled even in his own eyes; and if he gets into heaven at all, his place will be quite a low one in it. The sinner who has really repented, and from the depths of his abasement, shame and misery, has called on God's mercy and received it, will take a higher one.

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Shall be exalted, not by being called a saint, but by really becoming one. Shall be exalted, not in the sight of men, but in that of God. Shall be exalted not on or by the earth, or by those that dwell on it but by being raised from the earth, from its passions and temptations; shall be exalted above sin, and brought near to God Himself. This is the kind of exaltation the saints have wanted and obtained. Humility, first, last, and all the time, is the very life and strength of the soul in its struggle toward the eternal kingdom; it is the foundation, never to be taken away, on which the whole spiritual life is built; and pride is its own overthrow, even should it come in at the very end. This is the interpretation of these words of our Lord which I would submit for your consideration to-day.

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OUR BOYS AND GIRLS.

THE LITTLE SOWER.

One pleasant Sunday afternoon little Bessie Nelson sat down to examine a book she had just received a present of. She opened it eagerly to look at the first picture. It was the picture of a boy sitting by the side of a stream and throwing seeds into the water.

"A wonder what this picture is about!" said she. "Why does the boy throw seeds in the water?"

"Oh, I know," said her brother Edward, who had been looking at the book; "he is sowing the seeds of water-lilies."

"But how small the seeds look!" said Bessie. "It seems strange that such large plants should grow from such little things."

"You are sowing just such tiny seeds every day, Bessie, and they will come up large, strong plants after a while," said her father.

"Oh, no, father; I have not planted any seeds for a long while."

"I have seen my daughter plant a number of seeds to-day."

Bessie looked puzzled, and her father smiled and said:

"Yes, I have watched you planting flowers, and seeds, and weeds to-day."

"Now I know that you are joking, for I would not plant ugly weeds."

"I will tell you what I mean. When you laid aside that interesting book and attended to what your mother wished done, you were sowing seeds of kindness and love. When you broke the dish which your mother valued, and came instantly and told her, you were sowing seeds of truth. When you took the cup of water to the poor woman at the gate, you were sowing seeds of mercy. These are beautiful flowers, Bessie. But I hope that my little girl is being planted the great tree, 'Love of God,' and that she will tend and watch it until its branches reach the skies and meet before His throne."

"And the weeds, father?"

"When you were impatient with baby, you sowed the seeds of ill-temper. When you waited some time after your mother called you, you sowed disobedience and selfishness. These are all noxious weeds. Pull them up. Do not let them grow in your garden, my dear."

CROOSING.

Some twenty years ago, Thomas Scott of Pennsylvania, one of the shrewdest and best-known of railway men in the country, who had worked his way up from a modest brakeman to the position of president of the great Pennsylvania railroad system, spent a few days in a country village. In the house where he boarded, a modest, but good-looking and active lad of about fifteen attracted his notice. He asked the school teacher about the capacity of the boy.

"He is dull," was the reply. "Thick-headed, stupid and incapable, though willing enough to learn. His father wishes to make a druggist out of him, but it is no use, he will never succeed."

Mr. Scott, watching the lad, observed that in affairs of daily life his judgment was clear and just, and that he was always busy—not with books, but with the chores around the house or some mechanical work. The boy's parent were induced to take him from school and Mr. Scott gave him work in the yard of a railway.

"Now," he said, "you have no longer to deal with books, but with things and men. Make your own way. I believe you can do it."

It was the first time the boy had been told that he was not wholly a dolt. He proved to be energetic, intelligent and faithful in his work. There was a certain firmness and cordiality in his manner which gave him control over his associates. He was soon sent out upon the road in charge of a gang of men. A few years later, when Mr. Scott came that way again, the young man was superintendent of a division. He afterward rose steadily to the front rank in his profession.

A boy is too apt to be influenced in the choice of his life-work by some accident or petty motive. His father and grandfather have been successful physicians, or manufacturers, or bankers, and it seems natural and right for him to follow in their footsteps. Or his intimate school-fellow is going to study law, and he must do the same.

Ambition sometimes leads parents to induce their children to choose a profession for which they have no capacity whatever.

In each case there is great danger that the boy's life will be a complete failure. There are hundreds of boys who must soon make choice of their profession or trade. One of the most momentous earthly questions will be set before them.

Don't be in a hurry, boys. Weigh everything well and do not let accident decide for you. Do not choose an occupation because it is more genteel than others. It is in the man who gives character and dignity to his occupation, as to his clothes.

Do not think, because you were rated dull at school, that there is no honorable place for you in the world. There are talents and powers which do not deal with books. God sends no man into the world without providing an occupation for him in which he may succeed and earn respect. You have yours.

But take care that you are fitted for it. The mere fact that the work seems pleasant and attractive to you does not prove that it is fitted to your faculties. You may be ambitious, but you cannot climb a ladder without your feet and hands. Pray often to Almighty God, the Blessed Virgin and your patron saint to assist you in your choice. Lean the strength of your feet and hands, find the right ladder and then go ahead, trusting only in God and to yourself to make your own way upon it.

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND TEMPERANCE.

At the annual conference of the Catholic Truth Society, held at Birmingham last week, Canon Murrane, V. G., of Southwark, introduced the questions, "How far ought the Catholic Truth Society to take up the cause of temperance as a public movement? Should the society attempt to provide a Catholic literature on the subject? Should it include in its literature papers on the temperance movement, as well as upon total abstinence?" To all these questions he answered emphatically, "yes."

Intemperance, drunkenness, the use of intoxicating drink, is doing and has done, directly or indirectly, in the past fifty years, more injury to Catholic interests than any other evil—than all others combined. It was needless to burden them with such evidence. Every priest before him knew, if his daily duty was in a large town, that day by day, at every turn, he was confronted with the sin of drunkenness. There was the enemy. It kept his people from Mass and the Sacraments, it occasioned other sins worse than itself, and it made homes dens of dirt and desolation; it intensified his difficulties in school management; it overtaxed his means of charity, and, in a word, piled up before him such an accumulation of sin, poverty, indifference, and obscenity that he often felt in the depths of despair. (Cheers.)

The Bishop of Salford said that he could not conceive any Catholic with a heart larger than a mouse who would not feel that there was a duty resting upon him to do something to promote temperance. (Applause.) No Catholic who understood the havoc made by the drink traffic in the midst of the population in which he lived could be unwilling to take his part in bringing a remedy to the frightful evil. He should go down to his grave unable to understand—say, by bill, and bowdlered at the thought—that there had not been a persistent, universal, organized crusade by all Catholics, clergy and lay, high and low, rich and poor, against the evil—(loud applause)—and he simply despaired of human nature at the fact that coldness, opposition, contempt, and ridicule had been shown by holy and zealous Catholics to those who, with no greater obligations than themselves, had at last tried to effect a remedy. (Renewed applause.)

Speaking of the drink bill of this country, (£130,000,000 per annum) he said that were not England, with her natural resources of coal and iron, the richest country in the world, her people would have drunk themselves into a nation of paupers long ago. He would add that were their Church not the Catholic Church the world would have been destroyed in the past fifty years. God had saved the Church in spite of them. (Applause.)

It was not a case of mere leakage; they were scuttling the ship. (Renewed applause.) Did they ever try to picture the history of the Catholic Church in England during the past fifty years if Catholics had taken up universally and with continued fidelity the temperance principles of Father Mathew; if even the thousands who took the pledge from him had kept it, and handed on to their children the example and teaching of temperance he gave them? They might write the history of that most important epoch in letters of light. It would be an argument for the Catholic faith through all time. (Loud applause.)

Canon Docket said there could not be two opinions about the enormity of the evil, or its injury to the Church; but the society should not, in his opinion, be transformed into a large temperance movement. There would not only put an end to the society, but a heavy blow at that glorious cause of the world, temperance. But it was their duty to seek some means by which they might lead a helping hand to that cause, and to his mind temperance and thrift stood upon the same footing. Hitherto it had been one of the faults of ardent temperance reformers that they affected to teach Catholics—Bishops, priests, and lay—(Applause.) Henceforth he hoped that the Truth Society would prevent that, by taking temperance as its handmaid, though not as its mistress.

Mr. T. Nichols (Glasgow) confessed himself in this matter a fanatic. If the society had done nothing else than to afford an opportunity to call the attention of Catholics—Bishops, priests, and lay—to the question of intemperance, it would have amply made out its title to support. The measure of the advancement of temperance in the Church was the number of their clergy who had become total abstainers. (Applause.)

The Rev. W. O'Connell asked the conference to consider why Father Mathew's work had not been followed up. He dared not state the cause, as to be made in which the Church should assil this widespread vice, he thought they must humanize the people before they could Christianize them. (Hear, hear.)

The Rev. Count van Steen and some other gentlemen advocated temperance rather than total abstinence.

Canon Murrane replied that he never heard of any body of men doing much good on this question except upon total abstinence principles.

The Bishop of Salford observed that there was no danger of their becoming a temperance society pure and simple; but he took it that they all desired to see the society issue some strong temperance literature. (Applause.)

The Catholic Bishops of this country were deeply interested in the movement. At their last annual meeting they unanimously determined to give a strict order that in every Catholic church and chapel throughout the country, on the first Sunday in every month, and year by year, there should be read from the pulpit a list of temperance resolutions, with an instruction thereupon that every person in the congregation should be invited to contribute something, if only some special prayer, towards furthering this movement.—The Weekly Register.

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE CONFESSORIAL ON PURITY.

Catholic Review.

A correspondent of the Christian Register, in noticing Father Walker Elliott's sermon at the consecration of three western Bishops, last December, uses the following language: "The confessorial has given the Church an immense power over the conduct of its members, which I believe it has used wisely in the interest of female purity. Undoubtedly its female Orators have aided in this good work. Unfortunately, the great body of Protestant young girls are receiving no instruction or friendly counsel on that subject from either minister or mother. Personal purity has been held to delicate a subject for even a mother to allude to, and so the child is left to chance to learn the most sacred things. Let the Protestants gladly admit what the Catholics are doing in that respect, and emulate us, for example."

"That is frank, and it is as frank as frank. Such outspoken utterances in a Protestant paper, especially a paper like the Christian Register, which, on occasion, can say sharp and cruel things of the Catholic Church, are encouraging. They show that the superiority of the Catholic system is becoming known and appreciated by many outside the Church. But when the Protestant brethren are exhorted to emulate the example of Catholics in the question naturally arises what do they mean by that? If it were a Ritualist that was writing we should of course conclude that he meant to recommend that the confessorial should be established in all the churches. But it would be a great stretch of credulity to imagine that a Catholic would deliberately recommend the confessorial to his brethren. But how else are they to emulate the example of Catholics? It is perfectly true, as this correspondent says, that this matter of personal purity is held too delicate a subject for even a mother to allude to, and hence Protestant children are left to chance to learn the most sacred things.

Every Protestant clergyman who is conscientiously devoted to his work and is seeking the highest spiritual good of his people, has learned, from sad experience, how extremely difficult, nay, in most cases, how impossible, it is to get their confidence sufficiently to relieve their troubled consciences on certain subjects of a delicate nature which above all others need the advice of a trained, judicious and wise spiritual director. Suppose they are pompously commended, for the stress of great anxiety, to open their hearts to their pastor, what security have they that the confidential communications will not be imparted to his wife, and that she—of course, under solemn injunctions of secrecy—will not intrust them to the safekeeping of her most intimate and trusted friend? Then, shall they be able really and effectually to emulate the example of Catholics? We will tell them. In the first place, they must be convinced that Confession is a Sacrament, of Divine Institution; that it is not only a duty but a privilege—in fact the greatest boon of God to man; and that when our Lord said: "Whose sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whose sins ye retain they are retained," it was necessary for Him to add a command that the people should confess to them, for the necessity of confession is implied in the very power of remitting and retaining sins. For how could they tell what sins to remit and what to retain unless they were confessed to their attendant circumstances? But the penitent must also be convinced that there will be no possibility of their confidence ever being betrayed; that the lips of the confessor will be forever sealed; that they can go with even more confidence to their spiritual than to their bodily physician for advice and direction upon the most delicate subjects, and that as the bodily physician is prepared for his very responsible and delicate office by a course of special scientific training, so should the spiritual physician be prepared, for his even more responsible, and if possible, more delicate office, by a thorough training in the science of moral theology, which has reference to the guidance of souls in all the various relations of life.

But all this, we need hardly say, is to be found only in the Catholic Church. Alas, that so many honest, conscientious souls, dear to God perhaps on account of their sincere desire to know the truth, should be left to grope all their lives in darkness and doubt, carrying a secret burden which they long to share with some competent, trusted, confidential and sympathetic friend and adviser, and which, for the want of such a friend and adviser, poisons their peace of mind and stunts their growth in a healthy, rational, robust life. No wonder that Protestants are not infrequently found stealing into Catholic confessorials. The wisest and holiest among us need spiritual direction, while for the young of both sexes the confessorial may be said to be the only real safeguard against the temptations to which they are exposed.

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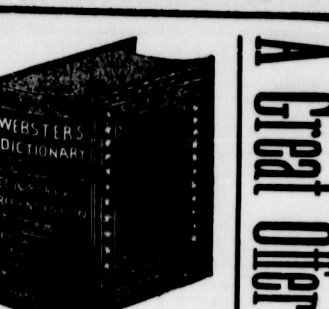
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