

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUI, D. D.

SUNDAY BETWEEN NEW YEAR'S DAY AND EPIPHANY

THE FREE WILL OF MAN
 "At that time when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead that sought the life of the Child." (Matt. II, 19, 20)

Free will is one of man's greatest blessings. It is, however, often abused. When God endowed man with it, there is no doubt that he intended man to use it as He uses His own. God uses His will only for good; to do this good or another good, to do a good in one way or in another. He can not use it to do evil, for evil is not of God. To be able to do good or evil is not essential to free will, but rather an effect of it.

Man can do many things physically which he may not do morally. He should therefore keep this distinction in mind: namely, that he may not do everything morally that he can do physically. He would not abuse his freedom, if he were thus directed in his actions. God could prevent him from abusing it, but He does not, at least physically, even attempt to do so, for if He did, He would interfere with man's freedom and prevent him from meriting by his actions. This is God's manner of acting in all things. He does not, except miraculously, interfere with anything He firmly has established, and the laws governing it. If defects follow from this order of things it is not God's fault, but it is owing to man, or it flows from the sins of man. How unjust, in the face of these truths, are the cries of many men against God, because He does not prevent disasters and misfortunes that come over the world! They would have God change the nature of man, which man himself deprived of its primal integrity and purity. How unwise, also, the tactics of infidels and atheists who draw arguments against God, or against His very existence, from these same facts!

The established order of God, though man did disturb it, is now inevitable. Why should God yield to the wickedness of man and change things for him? When man first was made he was of all earth created beings the most perfect; he possessed all the human heart craves for, yet he abused his estate. Who will blame God, his Maker, for imposing severe but just punishment upon him? This punishment was as much as was deserved, for it was meted out to him by a God who is justice itself, and from whom all justice flows. The injustice was not done us. How, then, can we judge what the punishment should be? Were we the God who was offended, then, and only then, could we judge of the justice of the punishment. But such weak beings as we are, possessing but a spark of God's intelligence and wisdom, we must bow down before Him, the offended and just One, and admit that the punishment is just because imposed by Him. Let man cease to consider this world his true home, and then he will begin to overcome the difficulties that seem to be in his mind regarding the justice of God in the punishment He sent upon the human race. In eternity, where man's true home is, if he does his duty here, there will be no such disasters or misfortunes. Since God can not give to man something he has shown himself worthy of here in this world, yet since He has made man for it, He will give it to him in another sphere.

He may not protect, apparently, even the man who does his duty here, but He will protect him for eternity. How forcibly is this whole truth brought out in the Gospel of today! God could have changed the heart of Herod and not allowed the Infant Saviour and His parents to suffer the inconvenience of a journey and a stay in Egypt, a foreign land. But had He changed Herod physically, He would have been acting contrary to the free will Herod possessed; had He changed him morally, He would have been acting against the laws established by Himself regarding His grace. So everything went its usual course, while He protected His chosen and deserving one, even at their own temporal cost and suffering.

It is thus that God acts with the faithful soul. If he does his duty conscientiously, he will be protected by God; not, perhaps, from the hands of worldly enemies or from what we are wont to call temporal misfortune, but from the powers of evil, which can injure his soul. And God will protect him for eternity. He does not resort to such extraordinary ways as He did regarding His Divine Son, but He accomplishes His object; and it is only when we have this clear vision of heaven that we will see this fully.

Nor need we ask for any particular assurance that God acts thus with people who are faithful to Him. He has promised that He does so, time and time again, in His Scripture. These few little words: "Fear not him that kill the body, but rather fear Him that can cast thee body and soul into hell fire," are enough to convince us of its truth. The well-known words of St. Paul also confirm it: "The sufferings of this life are not to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us." How comforting should this truth be to us! With how much courage should it inspire us! Life's path is

a thorny one, but we need not give way under the prick of its thorns. Ere long, our journey will be ended, and the scars that we will have suffered during it shall be to our glory and to our joy.

THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW

How swift they go,
 Life's many years,
 With their winds of woe
 And their storms of tears,
 And their darkest nights whose
 shadowy slopes
 Are lit with the flashes of starriest
 hopes.
 And their sunshiny days in whose
 calm heavens loom
 The clouds of the tempest—the
 shadows of the gloom!

And ah! we pray
 With a grief so dear
 That the years may stay
 When their graves are near;
 Tho' the brows of Tomorrows be
 radiant and bright,
 With love and with beauty, with life
 and with light,
 The dear hearts of Yesterdays, cold
 on the bier,
 To the hearts that survive them, are
 evermore dear.

For the hearts so true
 To each Old Year cleaves;
 Tho' the hand of the New
 Flower garlands weaves,
 But the flowers of the future, tho'
 fragrant and fair,
 With the past's withered leaflets may
 never compare;
 For dear is each dead leaf—and
 dearer each thorn—
 In the wreaths which the brows of
 our past years have worn.

Yes! men will cling
 With a love to the last,
 And wildly cling
 Their arms round their past!
 As the vine that clings to the oak
 that falls;
 As the vines round the crumbled
 walls.
 For the dust of the past some hearts
 higher prize
 Than the stars that flash out from
 the future's bright skies.

And why not so
 The Old Years,
 They knew and they know
 All our hopes and fears;
 We walked by their side, and we told
 them each grief,
 And they kissed our tears while
 they whispered relief;
 And the stories of hearts that may
 not be revealed
 In the hearts of the dead years are
 buried and sealed.

Let the New Year sing
 At the Old Year's grave:
 Will the New Year bring
 What the Old Year gave?
 Ah! the Stranger Year trips over the
 snows,
 And his brow is wreathed with many
 a rose;
 But how many thorns do the roses
 conceal.
 Which the roses, when withered,
 shall soon reveal.

Let the New Year smile
 When the Old Year dies;
 In how short a while
 Shall the smiles be sighs?
 Yes! Stranger Year, thou hast many
 a charm,
 And thy face is fair and thy greeting
 warm,
 But, dearer than thou—in his shroud
 of snows—
 Is the furrowed face of the Year that
 goes.

Yes! bright New Year,
 O'er all the earth,
 With song and cheer,
 They will hail thy birth;
 They will trust thy words in a single
 hour,
 They will love thy face, they will
 lend thy power;
 For the New has charms which the
 Old has not,
 And the Stranger's face makes the
 Friend's forgot.

—REV. A. J. RYAN

THE OLD YEAR'S BLESSING

I am fading from you, but one draw-
 eth near.
 Called the Angel-guardian of the
 coming year.

If my gifts and graces coldly you for-
 get,
 Let the New Year's Angel bless and
 crown them yet.

For we work together; he and I are
 one;
 Let him end and perfect all I leave
 undone.

I brought good desires—though as
 yet but seeds;
 Let the New Year make them blossom
 into deeds.

I brought joy to brighten many
 happy days;
 Let the New Year's Angel turn it
 into praise.

If I gave you sickness; if I brought
 you care;
 Let him make one Patient and the
 other Prayer.

Where I brought you sorrow, through
 his care at length,
 It may rise triumphant into future
 strength.

I gave health and leisure, skill to
 dream and plan;
 Let him make them nobler—work
 for God and man.

—ADELAIDE A. PROCTER

IN OUR MIDST

If it be true that there is always something sad about endings, then the close of the year could not have a month more in sympathy with the spirit than December. This twelfth month is ushered in with nature's most gloomy look; the richly tinged beauties of the earth which cast a lovely charm over early November and imparted to the passing year that restful hue suggestive of ripe old age, have given place to barren woods and bleak landscapes, where beneath our tread is heard the melancholy tracks of winter's gathering—summer's gay leaves and fragrant flowers, now decaying in universal death. How weird the wind now sighing half expectantly through empty branches, now pausing in dismay to discover no traces of its former playfellows young and fresh in life, now shrieking in horror as it descends to find in silent heaps and cold in death the companions of its merry gambols. "Come on to play," it seems to cry as in ghastly pretence it forces out the dead to frolic in the wood. Alas! they stagger forth only in death to sink into restless grave; whereon in awful horror the tempest screams and rushes forth as if it would tear itself in twain and beat against the walls and hills in agonized despair.

This conformation, this horror, this despair, typifies the condition of the human soul that has not served its God, when, on the day of Judgment, bereft of earthly life it will seek in vain for living deeds of virtue, will bring forth its soulless work as witnesses, then, horror-struck at their futility, will rush forth, cleft asunder by the sword of despair, and harried by the worm that never dies, will beat against the mountains and cry out to fall upon it and stifle out its life. The church seizes upon this front of nature to impress upon her children the reality of the end of the world that will surely come, the day of Judgment; for with the beginning of Advent she puts before us the Gospel in which our Lord tells us, "when you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand." She is warned; who the Jews she does a sober garb, vests her ministers in the color of penance. She is penitent on account of the sins of her children; she shudders at the thought of that wrathful day, when perhaps some of her children, she trembles lest they be many—shall be lost to her. She puts on the vesture of penance to remind us, her children, that our personal misdeeds should be atoned for by contrition. She bids us now, now while fears prevail, weep for the sins which at the Judgment tears cannot deliver to mercy, for then the time of mercy will be past. Through St. Paul she speaks to us in the Mass, saying "it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. . . . Let us cast off the works of darkness. . . . Let us walk honestly. . . . not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy."

True, she is sad. But throughout this sorrow is a note, a strain of joy, first indistinctly rippling, then soft and pleading it thrills with firm reverberation the sacred chant and, echoing in each Christian heart, begins, like life's pulsation, to throb in all the members of Christ's Mystical Body, rising and exulting to gush forth on Christmas morning in the angel's song—"Gloria in excelsis Dec."

In the same Gospel that tells us of the Judgment are spoken words for the comfort of the just on the day of wrath, but which at this time have a very special message for the Church; our Lord said, "When these things begin to come to pass look up and lift up your heads; because your redemption is at hand." St. Paul's admonition, too, is spiced with words of sweet hope as he bids us rise from sleep, for he assures us that our salvation is near, that "the night is passed, and the day is at hand."

"The day is at hand." Advent is the beginning of a new day, a new church year. If the past year has been night, a time of darkness in which our soul was indolent in sleep we have hidden now to rise and shake ourselves, to cast off, throw from us, the works of darkness, in which we lay down at our ease, to rise up, not indeed to enter heaven, but to gird ourselves, for a struggle with the enemies of that salvation which is near; to "put on the armor of light." Adam and Eve by their fall robbed us of our first armor and, as a consequence, every soul comes into this world pierced with a deadly satanic shaft and, as we grow old Satan from new vantage points makes of us his targets; we need then, something that will make us proof against his arrows, we need an armor of light that will not only turn aside the missiles of hell but will point out the lurking places of the enemy. Where can such an armor be found? The apostle does not leave vague his admonition but adds "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Christ is our armor of light; He points us out to us the way and leads us forward on it, He tells us the truth and shows us how to practice it, gives, preserves, is our life.

His coming has been whispered,—He is nigh. But we must not, as did the Jews, fail to recognize Him. The Jews were filled with hopes of an earthly saviour who would relieve them of the hated Roman rule and bring them great temporal glory and an earthly kingdom. He is nigh, but His kingdom, His glory, is not of this world. It is into our hearts He

wishes to come, and it is in hearts detached, humble and holy that we must "put Him on." By prayer and penance our souls are to be tuned that, when He speaks to our hearts, His words may find echo there and be heard. The Gospel of this Sunday of Advent now warns us in the words with which St. John the Baptist warned the Israelites, "there hath stood one in the midst of you whom you know not." This too, is "Gaudete Sunday" and the Church, having thrown off her garb of penance, is vested in the rose color of joy; it seems as though her strong heart, unable longer to contain itself, had burst, with a gladness, which surges in the chant and swells the organ notes with the joyous message of St. Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. . . . The Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous." Does this train of joy awaken echoes in our hearts? He is nigh, He will soon stand in our midst. Do we know Him? Or is our heart out of tune, is our vision clouded, are our ears muffled by the cares of this earthly life? On the second Sunday of Advent we were admonished to "Arise. . . and stand on high; and behold the girl that will come to thee from God." If we did not arise from our life of negligence, if we did not "stand on high" by practicing virtue, then we can scarcely have obtained the promised joy. In that case the words of St. Paul on this Sunday hardly apply to us, for we should be solicitous to "arise and stand on high" as soon as possible. Then after we have done this, when He is nigh, we can recognize Him, when He is in our midst, we can know Him, then we can rejoice and "be nothing solicitous." It is confidence we lack, confidence in Him who is coming as our Infant Saviour? That is wrong. If we approach Him in the spirit of contrition, if by change of life "we make known our modesty to men" we can approach Him without solicitude as soon as possible. The Church admonishes us to confidence and, finally, on this Sunday after Communion, when our Lord is nearest to us, exclaims, in the words of Isaiah, "Be ye comforted, O ye timid of heart, and fear not; behold our God will come and save us." It is not to our own merits that we must trust, nor should we despair at the thought of our great sinfulness, but in the sweet hope of a contrite heart we ought to trust in Him, be comforted by Him, who is coming to save us, coming "to heal the contrite of heart."

This, then, is the spirit of Advent, contrition, hope, joy. A new year is dawning, the night is past, the future before us. We still have time, time in which to turn to Him, to love Him, to cement ourselves in Holy Communion to Him who is coming from heaven to give Himself to us as our saviour; who by taking flesh from Mary's heart is going to bind with unbreakable bonds our poor human nature to the Godhead. With fervent and trusting hearts, therefore, we can sing in the words of the last Sunday of Advent, "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just one; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour."—J. S. in The Sentinel of the Blessed Sacrament.

AN UNCONVENTIONAL ORPHANAGE

When I was a youngster I got an impression of orphan homes that was anything but flattering. What gave me this unfavorable view was a certain sight that I was accustomed to see on a Sunday morning. On my way home from Mass I would almost invariably meet a "regiment" of small boys, anywhere from ten to sixteen years of age, chaperoned by an elderly gentleman, who followed in the rear with all the airs of a commandant. My logic on the situation might have been a little awry, but I concluded that if the boys were marched on the avenue in this fashion, they must be marshaled about the orphanage in much the same manner. Of course, such a thought was revolting to me, for I was at the time about twelve years old, the age when a boy loves to romp and roam and Robinson Crusoe like is incited by adventure and ever changing diversion. Imagine herding boys along in rigid double file! My youthful imagination conjured up a parallel picture in the caged lion of the circus parade.

FATHER DUNNE'S "HOME"

But there is another way of conducting orphanages, though perhaps it is more rare. In this category we might place the homes in charge of the Catholic Sisters, and especially that conducted by Father Dunne, of St. Louis, founder and director of the home that bears his name. "Father Dunne's" is the very antithesis of the old-time iron-bound institution that has its commemorative types today. As a vindication of his novel methods, Father Dunne can point with a just pride to fourteen years of really wonderful success in handling boys of all classes, creeds and nationalities. During this comparatively brief period he has "graduated" no fewer than 8,000 young men, who are at once a credit to him and an honor to the institution. They afford an undeniable proof that Father Dunne's method of making an orphanage a home and not a "hot-house" is at once most congenial to the boys and most successful in its results.

To know Father Dunne is to know the spirit that animates the home. The first time I met him he was in his office literally surrounded by his

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boys. Unconsciously my fancy called up a similar scene of a Man, 2,000 years ago, surrounded by the little children of Galilee, whom He had welcomed to His side with these touching words, "Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of heaven." Quiet and unassuming, Father Dunne combines the love of a mother with the kind supervision of a father. But underneath that composed exterior there is a warmth and enthusiasm of heart that is at once manifest when he speaks of his boys. This enthusiasm does not find its outlet in self advertising or abstract theorizing or consultation on what ought to be done, for he is neither greedy of self-publicity nor is he so idealistic as to put mere "words, words, words" before direct and immediate action. Moreover, he has no leisure to attend every social convention that comes to town, where too often much is said and little accomplished, for his youngsters occupy his every moment. Indeed the marvel is how he can stand the incessant strain. Practically single-handed, he provides throughout the year for 150 charges, and such years as we have just passed through, when food, clothing and all the other necessities of life were so costly. It would have been enough to drive an impatient man to despair. In the brief half-hour that I was there he was interrupted periodically by his boys, who had some need to be satisfied. Robert wanted carfare to visit some of his relatives. Frank wanted the price of admission to see a picture-show. Danny wanted a little spending money. Then the bell rang and Father was summoned to the parlor, but he was hardly on his way when there was a telephone call. While Father was gone I edged up to the younger, who had the seat of honor next to Father's chair. He was a little lad with his injured foot all swathed in bandages, and at the time was busily engaged in eating his dinner, which had just come hot from the kitchen. I looked at the plate and then at Kenneth, and said: "Surely, you aren't going to eat all that." The occasion was too great for words and he was too busy any way, so he just smiled as much as to say, "My stomach isn't hurt."

A THOUGHTFUL SYSTEM

One of the many beauties of the Christian religion is to be found in the constant suggestion which it presents of things eternal. Life in its manifold aspects tends to lead one away from man's final goal and destiny. Material pursuits which should prove of but passing interest, usually engross the energies and monopolize the activities of the greater portion of mankind. The result is that God and the things of the soul are relegated to one day in each week, if that much.

The Catholic Church, however, like a watchful mother, continually appeals to her children to fix their gaze on the better things. To this appeal she adds the force of law or counsel, endeavoring on every occasion to raise our minds to heaven and its beauties. For this purpose and to this end does she institute festivals and devotions, in order that by a variety of attractions she may win our souls over to a closer view, and as a consequence, a more fervid interest in spiritual rewards.

Thus it is that this time of the year, while preparing for the commemoration of the sublime mystery of the Incarnation, the Church bids the faithful pause each day and contemplate the goodness of God. She dedicates this period in a particular manner to actual preparation, in soul and in mind, for the reception of the Infant Saviour on His natal day. In this way also does she draw men's minds to a reflection on their eternal lot.

Many persons, it is true, allow such a season of spiritual blessedness to pass unnoticed. There are those, however, who enter into the real spirit of the Church and who seek to detach their thoughts for a time from the earthly and attach them to the glories of heaven. This should be the aim of every genuine, devout Christian; it is a dim fore-shadowing of the occupation that will for all eternity engage the activities of those who are saved.—Catholic Bulletin.

THE HEART OF A CHILD

"Know you what it is to be a child?" asked Francis Thompson, that wonder poet with the child heart. And he gives the answer thus:

"It is to be something very different from the man of today. It is to have a spirit's eye streaming from the white of the eye; it is to believe in love, to believe in love, to believe in love; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches and mice into men, loveliness into loveliness and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy godmother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is

To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And eternity in an hour; it is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it is to be commuted into death."

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