

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

By Rev. M. BOSSAERT

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

ON PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

Although St. John the Baptist lived nineteen hundred years ago, his words and his exhortation to penance are as applicable to us as they were to the people of his own time. We, too, have to prepare the way of the Lord, and, in our case also, to fill up valleys and bring low mountains is a task requiring much labor, many efforts, much patience and much perseverance.

In comparing true penance with such work as this, St. John indicates the amount of toil, self-conquest and perseverance needed, if our penance is really to be pleasing in God's sight. Our Divine Saviour taught the same lesson when He said: "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by storm." We must do violence to ourselves in order to reach heaven; we must shrink from no pains and no exertions; we must fill up all the valleys and bring low all the mountains that separate us from Christ, because in Him alone is our salvation.

1. What are the valleys separating us from Christ, and requiring for that reason to be filled up? The chief one, with which all the rest are connected, is the valley of unbelief. It must be filled with firm, unwavering faith, in all that God has revealed, and all that the Catholic Church, the pillar and stronghold of truth, bids us believe. This faith makes it possible for our Saviour to come to us, and, without such faith, we can never please Him. Christ can not bring salvation to one who has no faith, for "he that believeth not shall be condemned."

The second valley that we have to fill up is want of charity. God is love, and love is the chief thing that He asks of those who believe in Him. They must love Him and love also their fellowmen, as our Saviour said when asked which was the great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart," etc. Our Lord explained clearly how our love of God reveals itself, for He said: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." What we must avoid in order not to offend against charity toward our neighbor is taught us by the Wise Man in the words: "What thou wouldest not that men should do unto thee, this must thou not do to another." If, then, we cherish this twofold love in our hearts, and practise charity towards God and our neighbor, our Saviour will come to us and abide with us.

When once these two valleys have been filled up, the valley of unbelief with true faith, and that of uncharitableness with real love, it will be difficult to fill up those that still separate us from Christ. These are the valleys of impurity, injustice, slander and calumny; and they are incompatible with true faith and charity. It may cost many efforts and great exertion to fill them up, but remember, our happiness or our misery for all eternity depends upon our doing so.

2. But this is not all. We have also to bring low every mountain and hill that are obstacles preventing our Saviour from coming to us. These obstacles are pride, arrogance and self-love, but there are others also—avarice, envy, greed, intemperance, etc.

Our Lord comes in humility and lowliness, and to the humble alone does He bring grace and salvation. Whoever desires to be His disciple, must strive to become like Him, and deny himself, for Christ said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself," and "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." If, then, you desire our Saviour to come to you, acknowledge your own frailty and sinfulness, and confess that in Christ alone salvation is to be found. You know well enough that you can never secure the salvation of your soul and eternal happiness by means of the good things of this world, its treasures and riches. Consider well our Lord's words: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?" "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." Let us resolve to seek first the Kingdom of God, and to prepare the way of the Lord by having a firm and lively faith in the truths that He has taught us, by cultivating active charity towards God and our fellowmen, and by living a life of justice, humility and self-denial, for such a life will certainly be free from at least all grievous sins, and, when it is over, we shall behold the salvation of the Lord. Amen.

SWEET BABE OF BETHLEHEM

O happy Mother! happy beyond all thought: she has seen the face of Jesus, and He smiled into her face. Was it through tears? What significance was there not in that celestial human smile? He smiled as a son smiles to a loving mother. He smiled as the victorious Saviour who had redeemed her by her Immaculate Conception. He smiled as the Creator who complacently regards the most lovely of His works. He smiled as the last end and beatitude of her whom He rejoiced to glorify and to have with Him for eternity. He smiled as God, smiling unutterable and unimaginable things. Of a surety there was some special expression in that first look, in that many-

meaning smile, which reminded her of the Immaculate Conception as distinctly as if He had spoken. Nor was the joy of that smile less to her than its significance. But she alone can tell it. It makes us tremble with expectation to think that that smile will one day be a joy to us, and a joy which will not pass away. But, like all the aspects of God, that smile brought with it a world of grace. It was substantial, as God's visitations ever are, substantially effecting that which it expressed. Now, therefore, must it have lifted her in sanctity, and been to her almost like a new creation! A look of His converted Peter; what must a smile do, and a smile into His sinless Mother's face? O sweet Babe of Bethlehem! when shall we too kneel before Thy face? When shall we see Thee smile, smile on us our welcome into heaven, smile on us with that smile which will sit upon Thy lips as our own glory and possession for evermore?—Father Faber.

CHRISTMAS IN IRELAND

All nations celebrate the festive season of Christmas, but none conversant with the methods of celebration, in European countries will grieve the fact that in Ireland, a land of sainted memories and living, throbbing faith, the feast has a religious significance unequalled in any other land.

And this is but natural, for in the darkest hour of their checkered, but glorious history, the Irish people, instinctively religious, have ever been exceptionally loyal to the tenets and doctrines of that Church, compared with which the oldest dynasties are but of yesterday.

On Christmas eve all houses are furnished with large candles, lighted and placed in every window, signifying the light which the Magi used in their march to Bethlehem; and, in the mouth of Ireland this is the only light that the folk will allow during the twelve days of Christmas. These wax candles are about three feet in length and three inches in circumference, and are burned nightly from December 25 to January 6, the feast of the Epiphany, as those twelve days are generally given over to the celebration of Christmas, especially in the rural districts. All work save that which is imperative is abandoned during this time.

Holly in abundance decks every available piece of furniture within the home, for the good, old pious mothers of a few generations ago, told the children with full belief in the statement, that at midnight on the feast of Christmas, angels came and dwelt in every branch and opening of the holly.

For weeks previous to the festival, the houses, especially in the country, are all renovated and whitewashed, and the barns and stables are the objects of a rigid overhauling. The cattle receive special attention, and are better fed and better housed during this time than at any other period throughout the year. Farmers show their generosity to their neighbors by donating butter, eggs, cream, milk, potatoes, and every other farm product; and, in performing this philanthropic act, feel, owing to the happiness of the recipients, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

What an edifying sight to witness on Christmas the old and the young repairing to the lonely chapel, as they call it, in the gray dawn of the morning, some coming a distance of four miles on foot to approach the altar rail, as, without complying with this pious and time-honored custom, they would deem themselves Catholics but in name. What piety and reverence did not these fervent worshippers evince as the venerable pastor invoked in fervent prayer, heaven's choicest favors upon every member of his congregation.

On Christmas night the family and friends gather round the fireside, and the life and fiddle attuned to the finest pitch, are brought into requisition, at the sound of which the young and the old dance with vim and energy, jigs, reels and hornpipes until the clock tolls the midnight hour, after which the friends and neighbors generally retire.

But before the festivities end, the memory of some members of the family now a resident of America, or a far off Australia, is toasted in poetry and prose of a laudatory nature. His or her generosity to the old folk, and the filial love as exemplified in substantial presence which the exiled children of Ireland have manifested since emigration became a chronic natural necessity, is also also portrayed in song and story.

The feast of the Epiphany, or "Little Christmas," is a holy day of obligation in Ireland, and is observed with almost as much solemnity as is the greater feast.

On St. Stephen's day, the 26th of December, the boys and young men hunt and kill the "little wren," and carry it with measured steps as soldierly men from house to house, from village to village. Generally the marchers are rewarded with a slight contribution, which is spent for social purposes on that evening. Several legends are extant, stating why the wren, above all other birds, incurred in a particular manner the displeasure of the Irish people, but space will not permit me to comment upon, the authenticity or lack of it in this brief sketch.

Years have passed away; centuries have come and centuries have gone since the glad tidings of the first Christmas morn was heralded to the world, yet today in Ireland, the same religious spirit which enveloped the

manger at Bethlehem is as fresh and as vivifying as ever.—Professor Michael G. Rohan, Marquette University, Milwaukee.

THE RECTOR DISCUSSES HIS CHURCH

The Catholic visitor to New York, who strays into a certain ecclesiastical building of West 47th Street, will be puzzled for a moment; but the initial bewilderment will quickly yield to pity. In spite of the red lamp which burns dimly in the distance, and the lonely confessionals near the door, he will realize in the second instant that he is not in a Catholic church, but in a building which in many respects resembles a Catholic church. His guide-book will inform him that he is in the church of St. Mary the Virgin, an organization which, styling itself Catholic, is under the jurisdiction of that very worthy Protestant gentleman, the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York.

No one will suggest that the clergy of this church and their parishioners are "playing at being Catholics," yet the visitor cannot but marvel at the temerity of men who, without warrant either from the Archbishop of New York, or their own perfectly Protestant prelate, assume jurisdiction in what purports to be a forum of conscience. The wonder of it all, will deepen, on reading in the current American Church Monthly the truthful comment passed by the Rector of St. Mary the Virgin, on his Church and its pretenses:

"In the Anglican Communion you may deny anything you please; it is only when you affirm that you are in danger. The only thing for which one risks being disciplined is belief. 'Thou the Creed overboard, if you like; all that will happen will be a mild assertion from assembled bishops that the Church really does value the Creed, although appearances are against her. But be very careful you do not say too many prayers, or the wrong kind of prayers. There is nothing that irritates the authorities so much as to see people praying. The worship of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament will bring the authorities down on you—the same authorities who peacefully sleep through the loudly trumpeted denials of all the central facts of the Christian faith."

Were a Catholic to venture upon similar criticisms, he would at once be accused of bitterness, and a desire to score a controversial point at the expense of strict accuracy and charity. Nevertheless, they are very true, and in view of their undeniable character, the wonder grows why the Rector of St. Mary the Virgin still adheres to so faithless a Church, and to pastors who condone irregularities in communion with which adultery is a bright badge of virtue. A Church in which you may "throw the Creed overboard, if you like," is not the bark that will bear us swiftly into the harbor of God; authorities who are indifferent to "trumpeted denials of all the central facts of the Christian faith" are not the pilots appointed by Jesus Christ. They are steering straight for the reef, and how can the adherents of St. Mary the Virgin's escape destruction? Through their sacraments? All schismatics and many heretics have those sacred rites. Through their good intention? Possibly, but if eternal salvation may be safely staked on a good intention, why belong to any Church at all?—America.

TO ASSIST SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS ESTABLISH RETURNED SOLDIERS' COMMITTEE

Practical assistance for ex-soldiers and sailors in London, Ont., and vicinity, in the many difficulties encountered in the change from military to civilian life, is the aim of the returned Soldiers' Committee of London Council, Knights of Columbus, who have opened an office at the Catholic Club for the carrying on of the work.

All returned men are well acquainted with the Knights of Columbus, through the Catholic Army Hut at the front, in England, and in Canada, and the local Returned Soldiers' Committee has been formed with a view to broadening the field of the activities of the Knights of Columbus for Canada's fighting men.

The Information and Service office opened here is only one branch of the Committee's work. Here the returned fighter may find advice and assistance in his military and semi-military problems, questions of employment, and matters generally relative to his resettlement in civilian life. The signing and certifying of documents by a Justice of the Peace will also be carried on, and letters will be written for the soldier or sailor, when he wishes to communicate with any Government department with which he has business. The work is under the charge of Mr. E. V. Hession, who is at his desk from 9 o'clock till 5 daily. All the Services of the Information and Service Office are absolutely free of charge.

The local hospitals will also come under the activities of the returned Soldiers' Committee, and will be visited by that institution. It is also hoped that it may be possible to give entertainments for the various local military homes and hospitals during the coming winter.

Recreational work among discharged men generally is also being

discussed by the Committee, and it is possible that general work may be done along this line.

The organization of the Knights of Columbus Reconstruction and Employment Service is certainly the most extensive of its kind in the Dominion, there being nearly a hundred Returned Soldiers' Committees from coast to coast.

The work is absolutely undenominational, and as in the case of the Knights of Columbus Catholic Army Hut, all races and creeds are equally welcome to all that the Knights can do for them. Every Returned man is a candidate for the services of the K. of C. Returned Soldiers' Committee, which is willing, ready and able to help him.

N. B.—Unclaimed kits will be sent to the owners if baggage checks are forwarded to the Secretary of the K. of C. Catholic Army Hut.

A BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS CUSTOM

The wanderings of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph on Christmas Eve, before they found shelter in the stable where our Blessed Lord was born, are still commemorated in Spain, where they have posada, or hostelry processions, marches on Christmas Eve from house to house Children carrying images of Mary and Joseph lead the way, followed by a mixed crowd, all bearing tapers, who halt at door after door to ask admission. No response is given to their appeals until they come to the church, where the first summons is immediately answered by a voice from within, inquiring who is there. The spokesman replies: "It is Mary, the Queen of Heaven, who begs a place to lay her head; the night is dark and cold, and she is a wanderer from far Galilee." The doors of the church are thrown open, and the procession enters, to be led to a side altar prepared to represent a stable with a manger, dimly lighted by a single lantern. Here all kneel and recite the last prayers of a prescribed litany; and as the final petition dies away, a little boy with wings fastened to his shoulders and in his arms an image representing the Holy Child, rushes in, and lays his head in the crib. The tapers are then lighted, and carols of welcome to the world's Redeemer are sung.

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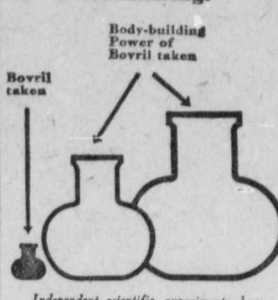
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