

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUX, D. D.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

THE MASTER'S VINEYARD

"At that time Jesus spoke to His disciples this parable: The Kingdom of heaven is like to a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.

It is a kind God who has prepared for man not only a reward but also means adapted for its attainment. He is unlike an earthly householder, for He offers inducements so enticing that man—without injustice to himself—can not reject His call.

His appealing voice must strike at the roots of every heart; His kind invitation must impel men's energy to set to work for His cause; and His outstretched hand must beckon with inflexible certainty to the pilgrim of earth.

This thought is brought out beautifully and clearly in the Gospel of this Sunday, God, the Householder, is shown as inviting all classes of men into His vineyard—men who have neglected the yesterday, and men who would be ready to neglect the today.

He can not gaze indifferently over the creature of His own hands, nor feel uninterested in His welfare. His desire is that heaven—the real home of His bliss—be shared by this noblest of the creatures of His hand.

There is no selfishness on His part, but a generosity that knows no limit. Sinful man would stand all the day idle were it not for the enticements and the voice full of love of the Master who made him.

It would seem, now since God has endowed man with a soul possessed of such noble faculties and had allowed him to acquire a knowledge of the things of God in the future life, that he would not need much further help from his Creator.

But, as in the beginning man fell from grace and integrity, so now he is no different; and the same God of mercy who could have annihilated primal man and woman, but spared them and allowed them to prepare for a reward in the future, now continues to have mercy upon man sinning in similar ways and greater degrees.

The sin of man at present is much worse than that of man before God had fulfilled His prophecies and promises by giving His Divine Son. The path has been laid out plainly, the presence of the dangers made more clear, and the possibility of eternal disaster without God's sustaining hand has been pointed out to all.

In fact, the infinite merits of the cross can come to man if he prepares for them bringing to him the strength and fortitude necessary to follow the path of virtue—the path that leads to glory.

However, even with all these helps ever attending man, and the great treasure house of graces open to him, still God's solicitude is extraordinary. We can not even compare God's love for us with the love of a father for his children. It is far too superior to it, and can be called by only one name—love of God for His children.

Man shows his baseness and his ingratitude by frequently rejecting the offers of his kind Father, and shutting his heart to the reception of His sanctified benefits. The independence of man has in many cases reached a stage where it is absolute defiance, and the sovereignty of the Creator has been deserted, as it is viewed from a human standpoint. The clear notes of His voice have been hushed by the cry of the modern gods that men have set up for themselves.

These hideous works of the creature offer certain joys, certain satisfactions—but they are only of the moment, and the trail they leave behind them is one of disgrace. They can do nothing to build up purity and straightforwardness in the heart of man, but they fill him with the rottenness of the demons. Yet, with all these lessons, which surely must be apparent to every reasonable mind, man will continue to offer incense to these false gods. He gives them the best and most precious fruits of his labors. Not a day can pass but he must approach the foot of the pedestal on which they stand, and pledge to them his allegiance.

What are these gods that man has erected to receive his homage—nay, all the works of his life? They are many and varied. One of the greatest and most conspicuous is money. Never before as today, nor perhaps ever in the history of the world, did man bend his knee so willingly to Mammon as at the present day.

He is devoting all the powers of his mind, putting to extremes every energy of his body, and sacrificing willingly the dictates of conscience, to worship at this shrine. In return he is given many things, but in the majority of cases they are things of earth. He could turn them into things that would profit his soul; he could use them for the honor and glory of God; he could

alleviate plentifully the sufferings of poorer humanly—but how little of this does he really do? Mammon demands of a man selfishness. It is but an angel of the satanic host that delights not in what man gives himself, but in that of which man deprives God, while thinking he is gaining much for himself. Money after all is dumb. What other idol could be set up except one without feeling, without hearing, without sight, without intelligence?

Another great idol that man has set up for himself may be called the idol of wordliness. This is more the god of the young than of his elders. The child's greatest ambition today is not that it may rise at the embrace of the Father of heaven, but that it may swoon in the pleasures of a world shifting toward materialism.

The little knowledge that it is inclined to gain will not reach beyond the things that we see and hear, and so it wishes to dwell only in things beneath the skies; and after all, where the mind dwells, there is the body too. Thus it is that we see thousands of young people offering the best and freshest days of their lives at the shrines of Dame Fashion or the god of show. Parents seem to be carried on by the same tide. They appear inclined to think that the children of the present generation do not need the restraint and guidance of those of the ages when faith was more alive. Why?—it may be asked. And we answer that it is because they, too, are frequent worshippers before the idols of unrighteousness.

Will the day ever come when all these people will heed the voice of the Master calling them to labor in His vineyard? For them the time is fast approaching when His voice will grow fainter. There has been a time when it was clear and resonant, but they were deaf to its call. Can they now expect that He, their Maker—He of all wisdom and goodness—will trifles with them longer? What an insult to His majesty, to His divine omnipotence, to His kind heart, to His astounding love! Why will people not believe His wisdom, and cast aside the wisdom of the world? Why will they let the fleeting things of earth blind them, and not look to the rays of God's wisdom for light to see the truth and the way?

BETTER BOOKS IN THE HOME

There has just been a "campaign on" to use the expression that became so familiar during the War, with the slogan "More books in the home." The idea is to supply books particularly for children. We have come to realize how much slogans, if they are but frequently repeated, induce action. At the beginning of the War even the great bankers of the United States declared that it would be quite impossible to sell bonds in the immense quantities demanded for war purposes, because the people of this country generally were not bond buyers. An advertising campaign was launched, however, with organized popular suggestion, and, as a consequence of slogans frequently repeated, every bond issue put out by the United States Government was largely oversubscribed. If we changed the people of this country from a non-bond buying nation into one that proved capable of absorbing not only the immense amounts of government securities offered, but any number of bond issues, both domestic and foreign, it looks as though we might, by such a change, be able to make the nation a buyer of books. Indeed, there has already been a determined effort for that purpose.

Since the campaign is likely to have a favorable response, it is extremely important that the wording of it should be correct. Under the circumstances surely the slogan should be not more books for the home, but "Better books for the home." A great many people seem to believe that books are just books, and that it must be beneficial to read anything that is printed, especially if it is bound in durable covers. In spite of this impression it should be unnecessary to say that there are a great many books which are positively harmful and even more of them which though lacking vicious qualities are negatively pernicious because they simply waste time, dissipate mental energy, fetter away the faculty for attention and dull that power of concentration which represents the most important quality of mind, that human beings can possess. To use the mind merely for amusement is like whittling with a razor for fun. It is hard on the next one who tries to shave with a razor.

We have entirely too many trivial books and a great deal too many actually vicious books. The vast majority of the books printed in our time are made merely to sell, with not any thought of good and indeed only too often with the very definite knowledge that they will do harm. Writers and publishers are without scruple in the matter, apparently, since the one idea is to sell enough copies of the books to make money. They think as much as little of the possible harm that may accrue as do candy sellers. Unfortunately most of the best selling books of our time are those that should not be in the home. If the slogan "More books for the home" is going to increase the sale of these a great deal of positive harm will be done, to say nothing for the moment of the influence for ill which indulgence in trivial reading brings with it.

It believes that the best selling books of the past year or two, are the

collections of series of cartoons which appear on the back pages of the afternoon papers and form such a striking feature of the colored supplements of the Sunday editions. "Bringing up Father," "Training Uncle John," "Silly Billy and His Antics," "Keeping up with the Smiths," and other such titles greet one from all the newsstands, department stores, window and vendor's packs. The art in these is almost unpeakable, the jokes are so old as to be doddering and the laughter evoked is usually because of practical jokes of some kind or another. It is a great joke in a series of cartoons to squirt water on a man or to pull a chair from under him or to hit him over the head with a club or to have something happen to him that is physically painful and causes mental confusion with it at the same time.

It was great French philosophic writer who said once, I believe, "Tell me what you laugh at and I will tell you what sort of a man you are." Certainly the things that our generation laughs at are quite unworthy of the fact that the definition "Man is a risible animal," was proclaimed by the old philosophers to be a good definition of the human being. We are the only animals that laugh and it is the very fact that we are rational animals and can reason about things that enables us to laugh. It is because of that that we can see the unreasonableness and incongruities of many things which cause the risibilities to be active, but the laughter provoked by practical jokes has no relation to reason at all. It partakes much more of that play which the animals indulge in so constantly with each other when they are very young and which consists mainly in knocking each other down and rolling each other over and occasionally bringing about confusion of behavior because of the confusion in the sensations induced by the physical disturbances of the body. That the best selling books of our time, for they are literally the best sellers in our generation, are crude pictures of practical jokes, and that we are in the habit of reading them, that is not flattering to self-esteem, to say the least.

Most of the other best sellers, as I have said, are almost as objectionable as these. The books which sell well are above all those that give the young woman a very prominent position in the lives of those with whom she is brought in contact and particularly make whatever she does and thinks of ever so much more important than anything her parents or elderly relatives of any kind may possibly have done or thought. The formula for writing a best seller is "Take a young woman, picture her almost supernaturally handsome, but of course unappreciated by those near and dear to her, have her wander off in search of adventures by herself and meet with hair-raising experiences and go through thrilling escapades, her beauty so deeply influencing all the men with whom she comes in contact that they are quite literally at her feet and of course would not harm her for the world. They may occasionally be an arch villain who may try to harm her, but she will be protected by her adores. There should usually be at least three of these, until she has made up her mind which one she will marry and then of course when they get married they will live happily ever after." Written according to this formula, books will sell, for young women are the principal readers and they know that the young woman is the most important being in the world, but unfortunately those around her do not always recognize this fact.

Of course, some of the best sellers are founded on sentimental gush. They take the young man who is a failure in life and perhaps a criminal, and put him in contact with a young woman of striking beauty, whose advice, for by intuition she knows the world and all its ways, lifts the man out of the wicked path into which he had wandered and enables him to become a respectable and respected member of society. Anything more untrue to life as it is, or to the world, can scarcely be imagined. Young women readers are led to believe all sorts of foolish notions especially in regard to the safety of the young woman, provided she is handsome.

All the books emphasize that older people are as a rule very foolish individuals who having been disappointed in life are now deeply intent on making life a disappointment for others. Some of them only mis understand but most of them are represented as actually conspiring to keep young men and women from opportunities for happiness because their own chances in that direction are over.

Nothing could well be less desirable than such books. They are not literature in any sense of the word, for literature must be a presentation of human life, a study of human ways and human motives. These are books written so as to present as many stirring incidents as possible in order to keep up the excitement but with the young woman in the center of the stage all the time. Whether they are detective stories, or stories of effete royalty in some imaginary country in Europe, or wild west stories, the girl it is that counts. Girl readers want to read about girls of their own age. People are interested in novel, as a rule, not in prophecy as they are put themselves in the place of the prominent characters in the novel which they are reading. Hence the universal rule now of making the young woman the most prominent character, because

women constitute at least nine-tenths of the readers.

Shall we have more books in the home then? Surely not more of such books, nor of the best-sellers generally. The slogan that we want repeated over and over again until it will have a suggestive value that will work itself into action is not more books, but better books. There are too many trivial books now. Half a dozen great books read over and over again would provide real education and development of mind. Lincoln had actually read only half a dozen books before he was twenty and on account of his very busy life he secured comparatively little chance for reading afterwards, and yet this half a dozen books made him one of the best writers of English in the history of the language and helped to develop one of the greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century. It would be much better to have half a dozen good books in any home in the country than half a million trivial books.

People are now making New Year's resolutions. I sincerely hope that these will contain something very definite with regard to the securing of better books for the homes of this country. There is a very definite purpose on the part of book publishers to increase their sales, but it remains for people themselves to see that the increase does good and not harm to the rising generation. The intensive book making of our time, as a matter of fact, doing ever so much more harm than good. Publishers' announcements are constantly telling us of the greatness of their recent publications, especially in fiction, but most of the books so elaborately announced in superlatives have but a passing vogue and soon disappear from the bookseller's shelves as well as from the advertiser's page. As has been very well said: "They were born yesterday, but thank God, they will be dead tomorrow." Most people who read them do so merely to kill time or at best to keep up with the fashion. Not to have read them is to have saved time and mental energy as well as to have spared concentration of mind from just that much useless dulling vacuity. A favorite form of announcement by certain of the publishers is that some particular volume is "the kind of book that makes you forget." Most of us want to cultivate our memories and not forgetfulness. For those who feel that way it is surely not a question of more books in the home, but better books in the home.

The young people of our generation are being spoiled by having too many things. It leaves them no time for thought. Thus has been called "the age of the child," but most of us older people would rather have a quiet Replian in thanksgiving God that we were not brought up in any such age. We had fewer books but they were better. Surely the best New Year's resolution that could be taken by parents would be to see that their children had fewer, but better books.—James J. Walsh, M. D. Ph. D., in America.

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GOLD WORSHIP

After the Israelites had grown tired waiting for the return of Moses from Mt. Sinai they took up among themselves a collection of gold and having beaten it into very high they kindled a fire beneath the shining and glittering mass. The gold softened like wax over a lighted candle and melted away into a glowing and shimmering liquid. This they poured into the mould of a stilly calf. The gold cooled down—the mould was removed and the Israelites beheld the form of a golden calf. They danced around it—bowed down before it and worshipped the idol of their hearts.

This worship of idols made of gold, silver or stone may strike us a bit foolish and ridiculous. But draw aside the curtain of our modern society and you will behold another form of idolatry, not in the shape of something more artistic, more scientific, more refined, and that is the worship of the "Almighty Dollar."

A MODERN CALF

This modern idol is indeed most powerful. Its voice can be heard across the vast Atlantic and Pacific even to the uttermost parts of the earth. Its heart is, at times, soft and tender when it looks with sympathy upon human suffering and comes to the rescue of orphans and widows and alleviates the misery of the poor and the needy. Often, however, its heart is pitiless and stony—without feeling—hard as adamant, when it creates hostilities and wars among the nations of the world, causing bloodshed and strife—starvation and ruin—demanding the lives and limbs of thousands of men and women in the name of the peace and happiness. Its eye is very sharp and keen. It can detect the slightest flaw in diamonds, pearls and other precious gems. It can expose the smallest imperfection in the costliest

furs and coats and merchandise of every description. It sees the insects on corn and wheat and fruit and knows how to analyze the rich and fruitful soil of the earth. Its ear is extremely sensitive even to the faintest sound. It hears the whispers of Wall Street in New York—State Street in Chicago, and the banking houses in London and Paris. It has its foot upon the merchant marine and the commerce of the world. And when this mighty god of gold shakes itself the pillars of the earth tremble. Yes, the golden calf of the Israelites is still being worshipped by modern society in the form of a dollar sign.

Sometimes this golden god of the world frightens us, especially during a panic or during a depression after a war, by means of industrial depression and a tightening of the money market. Then it is that you will find thousands of people who will cause themselves and others a great amount of unnecessary fright and worry by their cheerless conversations and their growing behavior. Prominent among such growers are oftentimes people in good and comfortable circumstances. Make inquiry and find out for yourself. Ask such people whether they are not making a living, and with some reluctance and much hesitation they will say, "Yes." With them it is not so much a question of making a livelihood as it is a question of making as much money as they would like to make. They have perhaps two or three thousand dollars in the bank; but they would like to have five thousand. They are earning a wage of four or five dollars a day; but they would like to earn six or seven dollars a day. To increase one's bank account by honorable and just means is indeed praiseworthy; but this everlasting grumbling breaks down the courage of others and public confidence in general. It is true, thousands of men and women are out of employment, facing poverty, and do not know which way to turn. Who is responsible for this state of things? Who is to blame if the honest workman cannot make a decent living? Undoubtedly it is the unjust profiteer, the man who uses the "get rich quick" method at the expense and suffering of the poorer class of people. Perhaps it would not be such a bad idea after all if some of our patriotic organizations would spend a little less time in rounding up the slackers and spend a little more time in rounding up the profiteers. Unjust profiteers are by far more unpatriotic and dangerous to their country than men who had not the courage to fight for their country.

Beyond a doubt, we all need money. Individuals need it—organizations need it—nations need it. But there are comparatively few people who know how to invest their money to the best advantage. On the one hand, they are too liberal, sinking it in stocks and mines and other departments of business. On the other hand, we find them miserly, extremely so, when it comes to investing their cash in any cause of Christ. They are very economic in Christian charity and in helping along a noble or religious cause. They forget that all they have comes from God and that God always reserves a certain portion of it to Himself. They keep back from Him what really belongs to Him, and whenever we keep anything back from God He comes and takes by force not only what we kept back from Him, but a good deal more besides. He takes it by means of any one of the thousand ways which He can employ. Why is it that many of us find ourselves in financial distress? It is because we have not yet learned how to invest our finances in the cause of God and religion. Many earn perhaps fifty or one hundred and fifty dollars a month and out of that sum of money God gets no more than ten or twenty-five cents on Sunday. We are God's workmen. He puts a certain amount of money in our hands. Part is His and part is ours; but many people simply appropriate the whole amount for their own personal use and entirely forget about the portion which belongs to God. The result is that God discharges us as His agents and leaves us cramped and crippled in money affairs and business, because we have not learned the lesson of Christian generosity.

AND HE COMES INTO HIS OWN

How are you making use of your wealth and riches? What percentage are you giving to the cause of God? If hitherto you have not known the secret of going on to fortune, then begin at once. If you are skeptical about it, then try it out on a small scale. Give to a good cause five or ten per cent. of your profits and notice results. No doubt there are many people so close-listed that they withhold every penny of the share which really belongs to God and in spite of it prosper and grow richer from year to year. But wait. Suddenly everything goes wrong. Their health fails. Sickness strikes their family. Their business fails. God is punishing them for their small-heartedness. God is bound to punish either here or hereafter. Do not for a moment think that you are excused from giving to God His share because you are poor. Give your percentage—your mite—even as did the poor widow in the gospel. Prove to God that you know how to handle money properly, and when God sees that you understand how to do this, he will entrust more to your care.—By Osmund Braun, O. F. M., in St. Anthony Messenger.

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