FIVE MINUTE SERMON

By Rev. N. M. Redmond

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

EFFECTS OF HOLY COMMUNION

"Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them." (John vi. 11.)

The miracle which Our Lord wrought on the occasion recorded in today's Gospel is constantly being wrought, only on a much larger scale. Is He not season after season multiplying the loaves and fishes to feed the multitudes of the earth? Is it not He Who gives increase when the few bushels become thousands? Is it not He that multiplies the scaly inhabitants of the deep so that the constant draughts of the fisherman exhaust not its riches? Because of His compassion, as on the occasion of His multiplication of the loaves and fishes in the desert, He is constantly repeating these wondrous miracles of which, on account of their familiarity, we take so little notice. Since, then, His compassion induced and daily constrains Him to do so much for the bodies of the multitude, why should we be slow to believe that He has done at least as much for their souls?

Are we, the multitudes of this earth, not in a desert? Are we not on our way home, and liable to faint on the way if the proper nourishment be wanting? Has He not taught us after He had wrought the miracle of the desert, how preeminently superior the food of the soul that He would give would be to that which He has given for the body? Has He not warned us against catching at the shadow and leaving the substance when He said: "We are not to labor for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you."

The spiritual food which on this occasion He promised, and which He afterward gave, is the most holy Eucharist. This is the nourishment which the souls of the multitude need on their way to their eternal home. Without it they will faint in the way. Our compassionate Lord saw this, and He wrought the miracle of miracles, as St. Thomas calls it, to give us the food for our souls. The body must have its food or life will not remain in it; so must the soul. This is her food by excellence. "The bread which I will give is My flesh for the life of the world" (John vi. 52.) By this bread, the flesh of Jesus Christ, the life of the soul is preserved, and she is strengthened and enabled to grow in virtue and sanctity. The effects of this divine food upon the soul are similar, as we may understand from John vi., to the effects of ordinary food with respect to the body. Hence Our Lord was pleased to give it to us under the appearances of Bread and Wine. It is even more than food, it is a medium which is sure to heal.

All are aware that it would be a most grievous sacrilege to receive this divine food in a state of mortal sin, that is to say, when the person is conscious of being in such a state. It is possible, however, for a person to be in that sad state without having a consciousness of his condition. Supposing this to be the case of one who receives Holy Communion, Jesus in the Sacrament remits the sin. Irreconcilable is the opposition between Him and mortal sin. To dwell, therefore, with mortal sin in the soul, He, the God of all holiness, could not. To abandon the soul in invincible ignorance of her sad state, He, the God of all mercy, would not. Hence He drives from the soul His and her enemy. This is in keeping with the ways of God in the old law, when, rather than allow the ark of the covenant to remain under the roof with the idol where it had been placed by the people unconscious of their fault, He destroyed the idol. Thus you see that by this Sacrament mortal sin is remitted, but only indirectly. It is also a most powerful antidote by which the soul is preserved from mortal sin, a truth clearly taught by the Council of Trent (Sess. 13, chap. 2.) Whilst its remission of mortal sin is only indirect, the remission of venial sin in this sacrament is direct. No good Christian will hesitate to deem it his duty to be free not only from mortal sin, but also as far as possible from venial, especially deliberate and habitual venial sin, when he receives Holy Communion. Still this is not rigidly exacted. Because should it so happen that the communicant, otherwise well prepared, has the stains of venial sin on his soul, this sacrament will efface such venial guilt. Every Catholic knows on the authority of Jesus Christ, handed down to him by the one true Church for whose infallibility Christ has pledged His divine word, that when he confesses his sins to an authorized priest, and with worthy dispositions, be they ever so great or numerous, their guilt and the eternal punishment for which they call from God's justice are remitted. But whilst this is so of the eternal punishment, it is not always the case that the temporal punishment due to these sins is likewise remitted in confession. This may be, or may not be, or may be in part remitted according to the dispositions of the penitent. One of the very consoling effects of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is, that in so far as it increases divine charity in the soul, it remits the temporal punishment due to mortal sin. This remission will be in proportion to the degree of our charity, and the latter will be greater or less according to our dispositions in receiving Holy Communion. Hence Our Lord said to Mary Magdalen: "Many sins are forgiven her because she loved much" (Luke vii. 47) Our Lord came to cast this fire of divine Charity, as the Scripture tells us, on earth so that whenever He finds a soul willing to have it enkindled, sin and the dross thereof are consumed. His favorite time for enkindling this celestial fire in the soul is when He enters her in Holy Communion. Then it is that He Who is charity itself unites Himself most intimately with the soul so that, to use the words of St. Cyril, "As when a person mixes wax with wax, both are blended together in one, so Christ is united with us in this holy mystery of union and love."

The practical fruit of our reflections on this day's Gospel should be to arouse in us a burning desire to receive this Bread of Heaven, and to partake of it with such dispositions as will insure for the souls the largest measure of its divine benefits. And especially during the Lenten season does the Church seek to arouse this our spiritual appetite. The worthy and frequent reception of the Sacraments constitutes a most important part of our Lenten observances. Listen to the voice of our Mother. Last Sunday she sought to deliver us from the dumb devil and open our lips to a worthy confession of our sins. To-day she exhorts us to the most worthy reception of Holy Communion. Following these her admonitions, our Lenten observances will nourish and strengthen our souls to eternal life.

TEMPERANCE

TOTAL ABSTINENCE

REV. JOHN G. BEANE, PRESIDENT OF CATHOLIC MOVEMENT, ON MODERATION IN DRINKING

Rev. John G. Beane, President of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America, has contributed the following striking summary of the Prohibition movement to the Catholic press:

We know that amongst those who drink intoxicating liquor many lead live of self-control, at least as far as the observation of the proprieties is concerned. Drink may not conquer them. They may not become totally slaves. The physical and moral degeneracy that accompanies the drunkard, the loss of social standing and fellow-confidence, is not so marked in the moderate drinker. He preserves the outward marks of good health, and seems to show no weakening of the higher moral part of him. He has admission into the select circles of society, he is credited with a broadminded spirit, and is a good mixer. He seeks excitement, stimulation, without any apparent serious results. And we admit that there are thousands of self-controlled drinkers—self-controlled for the present at least. But we cannot go farther in our admission—that they are always self controlled, or will continue to be.

INFLUENCE OF EXAMPLE

Now a modern drinker is apt to look upon himself as proof of the fact that drinking is not necessarily harmful. But he is a most dangerous man in a community, especially if he be a successful man, a man of high standing, a man after whom others pattern their lives. His influence over them is for evil, because he breaks down the barriers of sobriety which surround them. Weak young men follow his social example, his drink habit. He may have control over his appetite; he may deplore drunkenness, and wonder why all men cannot drink as he does. His weak clerk follows his example, but he does not control himself. He may be cast upon the streets, indignantly repulsed by his employer from whom he learned the evil habit. And shall the moderate drinker be excused from all blame?

The intemperate temperance advocate who raves and curses intoxicating drink, draws pictures of the extreme brutality of the drunkard, and the degradation, shame and poverty of his family, makes no impression, on the mind of the boy who sees his father drink, but has never seen him intoxicated. He is liable to think that it is safe to adopt his father's rule, and to regard the temperance advocate as a fanatic. But the boy may not have the strength of mind that his father has. He may not have the will-power to keep his hands firmly on the reins of that wild horse of liquor. The bad example of that father may open to the son the degrading life of a drunkard, without faith, without morals, without hope of eternity.

And even though the habit of drink be not inherited—and science has not proven conclusively that it cannot be inherited—the example is imitated; and the result is the same, —the taint grows and increases in the offspring. The father in his moderation, and let me add, in his selfishness and lack of a realization of the effect on his son, becomes a scandal—a stumbling block over which his son falls, perhaps never again to arise. Beyond a doubt there are in hell the damned souls of drunkards whose curses cry out for vengeance against the parents whose bad example started them on to the road to perdition. And think you that those cries are not heard? Think you that God does not visit His wrath on those to whom He had entrusted the souls of the scandalized damned?

HABIT OF TOTAL ABSTINENCE

In spite of all that may be urged in favor of prohibition—and I am not urging it—our real hope of saving, or of trying to save, our people, of becoming a sober nation, a drinkless, saloonless nation, our real hope of shaping into one, united, sober America the many who have come to our shores from foreign climes in search of liberty and the means of a livelihood, our real hope, I say, is in encouraging in our boys and young men habits of total abstinence. The young man who learns to like water as a beverage is far less likely to fall under the curse of drink than he who is restrained by law from procuring the liquor to which he has been accustomed. And there is a universal movement in our preparatory schools to teach the young the dangers that arise from the use of alcohol, to form them into organizations, and pledge them to sobriety.

The school days are ended, and the boy goes into the world, filled with grand ideas, enthused by the principles which he has been taught. He intends, and every earnest young man who sees the world before him for the first time, intends it—to make his life worth living, to be an instrument for good. And at the threshold of that world stands the awful example of the moderate drinker, the man whom that boy has learned to admire, in whose steps he is ambitious to walk, whose acts he accepts as the guide of his own. The moderate drinker has become the instrument, urging that young man to his ultimate ruin. The principles of school days are cast aside, because no one in the world, in his circle, practices them.

The moderate drinker is selfish. He does not realize, because he does not pause to think, that he is a responsible part of the human race. He cannot morally be indifferent to the effect of his example on others. He may have great strength of character; but the greater it is, the more followers he will have, and the more responsibility he will be under to give them a good example. He may be powerful and fearless; but he cannot on that account encourage the weak to pick a quarrel with an enemy that will vanquish them.

No matter how secure a man may be from falling under the power of drink; he should abstain for the sake of example. If every man would thus place himself on record, it would do more good in influencing the young than all the statistics and all the impassionate harangues that could be produced. So long as our youth can point to representative men who use liquor in moderation, and seem to suffer no evil effects, just so long shall our youth fall into the hideous vice of drunkenness. Our Lord's warning applies with force against the moderate drinker, the pace-setter of the drinking customs—for none imitates the drunkard—that he who is the cause of one of these little ones offending, is in a worse condition than if a millstone were tied around his neck, and he cast into the sea. What a horrifying thought that a man has been the occasion of the lost hopes and prospects for time and eternity of even one soul that went down under the curse of drink.—The Monitor.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The feast of Saint Joseph, which the Church keeps on Monday, March 19, may well serve to emphasize anew not only the dignity and blessedness of the home, but particularly the duties devolving on those who compose the Christian family.

It is to be noted that our Lord spent thirty years of His life upon earth in the sacred intimacy and privacy of the House of Nazareth, and only three in His public ministry. The keynote of that hidden life is found in the simple declaration: "He went down to Nazareth and was subject to them."

Our Saviour Himself thus gave the example of obedience to parental authority. Joseph, though only the foster-father of the Saviour, doubtless presided over the Holy Family, and exercised that authority which the head of the family possesses.

That sacred Home must ever be the model; and the Christian family is worthy of the name only in that measure in which it exercises properly its God-given authority on the one hand and calls forth on the other a ready and cheerful obedience. Now the possession of authority on the part of the heads of Christian families means very much more than the mere right to command; it connotes further the duty carefully to scrutinize the outside influences which are likely to nullify even the most careful home training.

Chief among these is the growing paternalism of the State in respect of children, with the consequent weakening of parental authority even in the minds of parents themselves and a corresponding lessening of filial respect and obedience on the part of children.

The parent cannot cede his right nor shirk his responsibility in respect of his child. However extensive may be the State's activity in regard to the education of children, the parent, in the last analysis is alone responsible to God. His care and watchfulness must increase rather than diminish in view of the present illogical and exaggerated relation which the State has assumed towards the child. Yet this attitude of the State has deluded many parents. They do not realize that their own authority is prior to that of the State, and they cede to the State rights and duties which they themselves can and should exercise and fulfill.

Children, on their part, are quick to take advantage of any lessening of parental authority. "Against the experience, the sagacity, the gravity and decorum of the gray haired, the youth of this age tumultuously rebel. Respect! Deference! Submission! Honor thy father and thy mother! Not if they know it! The spirit of the age is a spirit of levity, frivolity, scorn and scoffing. 'Let no man despise thy youth,' was written by Saint Paul; now it might be said let no man despise thy old age."

It behooves Catholic parents to guard jealously their heaven-sent rights and to fulfill with care and watchfulness their duties towards their children. Authority is the basis of family life; its proper exercise makes for family union and affection. The world today calls for the destruction of home life; but the House of Nazareth, which knew the blessedness of the family life of Jesus and Mary and Joseph, will ever be potent as the great exemplar of the Christian home.—Providence Visitor.

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In dear old Erin's land;
'Tis uttered on the threshold-stone
With smiles and clasping hand;
And oft, perchance, 'tis murmured low,
With sigh and falling tear,
The grandest greeting man may know,
The prayer, "God save all here!"

In other lands they know not well
How priceless is the lore
That hedges with a sacred spell
Old Ireland's cabin door;
To those it is no empty sound
Who think with many a tear
Of long loved memories wreathing round
The prayer, "God save all here!"

Live on, O Prayer, in Ireland still,
Live on for evermore,
The echoes of her home to fill
When uttered at her door,
And guarding by its holy spell
The soul and conscience clear,
Be graven on each heart as well,
The prayer, "God save all here!"

WHAT THE ANGELUS MEANS

"I was walking along the street one day with a Protestant acquaintance, and when the Angelus rang he said: 'Why does that bell ring so often, disturbing people all the time?' I told him that it was the Angelus. He inquired: 'What is the Angelus?' I said: 'It is a reminder of the fundamental basis of the Christian religion, the Incarnation of our Divine Lord. In the Protestant Bible you have it: 'Hail Thou that art highly favored.' In the Catholic Bible it is: 'Hail Full of grace. The Lord is with thee.' The Church has added the beautiful petition: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.' Then we recite the second part of the Annunciation. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to Thy word.' Then follow the 'Hail Mary!' and 'Holy Mary!' And the third part of the Annunciation then comes. 'And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' followed again by the beautiful 'Hail Mary,' etc. He said, 'I think that is perfectly beautiful, and I shall never hear that bell again without remembering why it rang.'"—Sacred Heart Review.

Man's conscience is the oracle of God.—Byron.

Fields are won by those who believe in winning.—T. W. Higginson.

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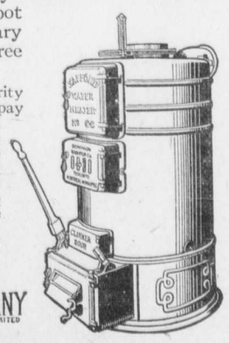

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