

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

"THE SALVATION OF GOD"

"And all flesh shall see the salvation of God." (Luke III. 6.)

It is one thing to see, and another to believe. Could we see everything in its entirety, we would believe it all. What we see with our bodily eyes, we generally believe; but what we cannot see with them, we are often loath to believe. Seeing is believing; but believing is not always seeing. We believe many things because we have faith, not because we have a clear vision of them. This belief is reasonable, since we have motives for our faith.

Now, any one seeing our Divine Lord during the days He lived upon earth, would not, humanly speaking, necessarily have been forced to believe in His divinity. It appeared as a mere man only. It was on special occasions that He did works proving His almighty power and divine mission. Any one not being present at these wonders, or not having heard of them, when seeing Him, would believe him to be as any other man. Perhaps one would have noticed some extraordinary qualities in Him, but these could have been ascribed to singular natural gifts. He may have possessed the truth, many regarded Him merely as a human being. The unbelievers of today so regard Him.

There is no reason why every one should not know Christ as he really is. All flesh should "see the salvation of God." The vision all should have of Him must be divine. In other words, it must be a vision by faith. Even had He never performed the great works we read of in the Gospel, we still should have faith in His divinity. The humble shepherds, who came to visit Him in the cave at Bethlehem on the first Christmas morning, had this faith in Him. So did the Wise Men from the East. Herod also believed in Him, though he did not fully understand His nature. His own mother, Mary, and His foster-father, Joseph, had faith in Him, though as yet He had not performed any great wonders. Why did they all thus admit His Godhead? Because they were rightly disposed for the reception from God of that great gift of faith. They really could, through that gift, "see the salvation of God."

How reprehensible in this regard are many of the world today! They do not—most of them never will—"see the salvation of God." Faith is a gift that must come from above. Like all high and divine gifts, it comes to him who is disposed for it, or who is ready to become so. Many are not disposing themselves for it. They are, rather, receding from it. Among this number are many who know that Christ is God. He will not, however, be their salvation. The world and its goods are practically their god. Beyond these confines they never cast their gaze. The work of Christ and the merits He gained during His life on earth, and particularly during His passion, are lost to them. Even should He appear in their midst, they would fail to reap the benefits flowing from His presence, as did the majority of the Jews of old. And their lives will be copied by their children, whom they allow to grow up without a knowledge of Christ. The great feasts that commemorate some event in the life of Christ are turned into days of worldly joy, and very often frivolity.

The feast of Christmas, now near at hand, is an example. How unholy will it be observed by a great majority of the human race! From a worldly standpoint it will be successfully celebrated, but few will pass the day in the proper spirit. Thousands of children, if asked what mystery Christmas commemorates, could not give a proper reply. No longer is an anxiety manifested and care taken to have children become familiar with the life of Christ.

Catholics, who alone are the guardians of the divinity of Christ on earth, should not allow themselves to be influenced by what is being done around them. The feasts of the Church should be celebrated in the proper spirit. They should not think so much of the temporal joy that the gay spirit of the world in festivity can bring them; but they should strive to have the joy of the Lord in their hearts. They realize that their only salvation is Christ. With His life they all should be familiar. The great lessons He taught, by word and example, should be known to them. The doctrines of the Church He founded, as the ark of their salvation, should be studied and learned by them. They should be frequenters of the sacraments He instituted. Their lives, in a word, should be such as would edify all, and be an open profession of what they believe within their hearts.

It is only in this way that they will be able to "see the salvation of God." They should not, however, be satisfied to see it themselves, but they also should be the means of causing others to see it. This will be possible only when they show forth their belief in their daily lives, and let their religion manifest itself in their every word and in all their actions. Not a religion that is feigned or exaggerated, but a true religion of the heart—one that gives unction to words, merit to actions, and works a saintly influ-

ence over others. The Catholic can thus do much for that part of humanity which oscillates with the world, and makes no real progress in the spirit. Now and then, at least, worldlings can be influenced to look above the world, and to search for the way that will lead them to where life's problems truly will be solved, and where they will "see the salvation of God."

PRIEST CAPTIVE

TELLS STORY OF THIRTY-FIVE DAY MARCH WITH CHINESE BRIGANDS

By M. Maslani (Paris Correspondent, N. C. W. C.)

The Catholic Missions of Lyons recently received from the Rev. Frederic Van Praet, a Belgian missionary at Soei-Yuen, a letter in which this heroic priest very simply but impressively told the story of his thirty-five day captivity among the Chinese brigands. Exhausted by his sufferings, the writer died shortly after the dispatch of the letter.

"The peril of brigands, *periculum latronum*, is in our day, as in the times of St. Paul, one of the dangers to which the missionary is exposed," says the missionary. "Nor is it the least of them. I have undergone the painful experience. The thirty-five days recently spent in the company of bandits were certainly the hardest of my life."

"On January 19, 1924, I had just baptized fifteen adults when, at about 10 o'clock in the morning, I was told that the village of Terisou was surrounded by a thousand bandits. I had the doors of my house closed. But we soon heard the crackling of rifles, and bullets were whistling past us. Any resistance appeared impossible. In fact, I saw the brigands climbing the walls and entering our building, rifles in hand. I went to meet them."

"It is unnecessary to shoot," I told them. "None of us is armed." "They went into my room, their revolvers levelled at me, and made me open everything. They took all; silver and clothing. In the meantime other bandits took possession of my mule, and another party sacked the church and the sacristy."

"The entire village was razed. Nothing was spared, either in the homes of the heathen or in those of the Christians. Several were taken as hostages. I was not even permitted to remain in my devastated home, I was dragged out, pulled by some, pushed by others, constantly threatened by their revolvers. I was thus forced to follow the brigands and to mount one of their horses, I was their prisoner and obliged to submit."

THE ATTACK ON KIA-LEULL

"We first reached Kia-Leull, about a mile from Terisou. The village was attacked, in spite of the resistance of a small garrison of thirty soldiers. During the struggle the head of the band, Sou-in-seng, called me. 'We hear you no hatred,' he said, 'we are tired of this banditry, we wish to join the regular army, and we took you prisoner only in order that you might forward our request to the proper authorities.'"

"I answered him that their enlistment in the army did not depend on me, but that if they wished me to carry any message for them, they would have to release me. All my arguments were useless. He would keep me as hostage and he told me to tell one of my colleagues the news. One of the brigands gave me a sheet of paper and a pencil and I wrote to Father de Blipole telling him that I was a prisoner, and begged him to tell my superiors and the Chinese authorities."

"Meanwhile the fighting had ceased, the Kia-Leull garrison had surrendered. The soldiers of the garrison were led to Sou-in-seng's room, where they were examined and the leader of the little company of defenders and one of the soldiers were condemned to death. They were both shot forthwith. As for the others, their arms and ammunition were taken from them and they were permitted either to join the brigands, or to return to their homes. Eight of them joined the band."

"In the afternoon, we started marching again and at the end of a couple of hours we arrived at the big village of Ho-chouei-Kuense. The sacking began again, followed by the usual orgies and slaughter. I had to share the brigands' meals, eat as they did, and with them. Excitement and weariness took my appetite. I could not sleep during the rest periods. At 11 at night, we began marching again. I was given a mule, and we proceeded at a gallop. Two men kept striking my mule with sticks to hurry it. This increased my fatigue considerably, especially, as owing to poor health, I had been unable to ride horseback for a number of years, and I had always used a cart. During the whole trip there were nothing but obscene remarks and jokes at my expense; they laughed a great deal at my having become a brigand. Among the puns there were many threats of death. I thought of Jesus Christ who also was insulted, scoffed at, and treated like a malefactor. The disciple is not above the Master. Why should I not suffer even as He?"

PEASANTS FORCED TO SERVE

"We proceeded along the Lama-van road, which was filled with carts. The brigands unharnessed the horses, each taking as many as he could, and when they could not themselves take them all they forced the peasants to lead them and follow the bandits. They already had two thousand horses and mules, which they had stolen in the villages and along the road. As these animals had to be fed, it was done at the expense of the localities through which they passed. This meant the ruin of each place as they were sacked of everything for the brigands and for their animals. But little they cared. And the poor people, who were thus forced to give up everything and be ruined, had to do so smilingly without a murmur, and consider themselves lucky to get off with their lives. Massacres are always part and parcel of the pillaging. One brigand told me that in five days forty persons had been killed."

"The two following days were very hard on me; the long horseback rides and the galloping had exhausted me. It was freezing and the intense cold increased my sufferings."

"On the evening of the third day the chief of the brigands made me write to Mgr. Van Dyck to tell him of my situation. Shortly afterwards I received his answer. 'My poor colleague,' he wrote, 'how I pity you. We will do all that is possible for your deliverance. Trust in Jesus and Mary. We will pray for you and have many prayers said for you. I bless you with all my heart.' Those comforting words were a ray of sunshine to me in my distress."

"On the fourth day, in spite of my increasing suffering, we had to make about twenty-five more miles. After that long journey we reached the Christian village of Fa-Noor. I was lodged with a catechist. What a joy to be with him and among Christians. It was like a family. I was surrounded with care, my torn garments were mended, my wounds were washed and dressed. I could not stand up, as I ached everywhere. I had reached the end of my strength. How could I keep up those wild horseback rides in that condition? Yet the brigands would shoot me rather than leave me behind. I thought my last hour had come. Were not the bandits who had taken me prisoner the assassins of Father Soenen? I prepared myself for death. Death is life, eternal life. . . ."

A COMPASSIONATE BRIGAND

"While I was absorbed in these thoughts, a charitable brigand came to me. He suggested going to get me a cart at Siao-noor, a neighboring village, where there were three missionaries, in future I should travel no longer on horseback, but comfortably seated in a cart and he himself would lead it and care for me. I accepted the suggestion, and thanked God who had inspired him. For a month, therefore, I was entrusted to the care of this good brigand, who never left me and cared for me to the best of his ability, always under the surveillance of the band."

"The fifth day, towards evening, we continued on our way. I was seated in the cart which my colleagues in Siao-noor had procured for me. My physical sufferings were to be alleviated. It would take too long to tell of all the vicissitudes of that long, painful road in detail, or to enumerate all the crimes perpetrated by the bandits of which I was a witness. In the meantime Heaven was besieged with prayers and fastings for my deliverance. But how escape that hell without a miracle?"

"Every day the band of brigands increased in number. From a thousand at the beginning they had risen to fifteen hundred with three thousand horses. In the villages, in fact, where there was a regular garrison, there were soldiers who, in order not to fight, preferred to join the bandits, and affiliate themselves, as they did, with the bolshevist 'Ka lao houei.' I soon learned that the governor of Soei-Yuen, being unable to subdue the brigands, had written to Mgr. Van Dyck to send a missionary to obtain from their chief their enlistment in the regular army. Father Benoni de Wilde was chosen for this purpose. A very delicate and dangerous mission. I soon had the immense pleasure of seeing him among the bandits. After that there was a constant going back and forth among the brigands and the Chinese authorities."

TAKEN INTO REGULAR ARMY

"Finally, on February 22, the rebels were enrolled in the Republican army, at any rate those who had rifles. There were four hundred of them. The others were sent home. The two chiefs became military mandarins. The same day I was released by General Tchao, who took me to Pao-tou. Thus ended my captivity which had lasted thirty-five days."

"The following day I arrived by train at Houei-hoa th'eng. A regiment was waiting for me and I was led to the Tou-toung to the flourish of trumpets, where a big official dinner was given in my honor. On March 10 I returned to my residence in Terisou. Everything had been sacked and pillaged with a damage of ten thousand francs."

"Christians and heathens care in a body to welcome me back, and

many expressed a desire to become Christians. All of them, like myself, had lost everything, all had suffered. God saves souls through suffering. Without it there is no fruitful apostleship."

SYRIA

By Right Rev. Mar. John F. Noll
Palestine and Syria were usually grouped together as one country until after the World War. Now Palestine is under English rule and Syria is a French colony. Ten years ago the population of Syria was 2,700,000, but immigration and starvation have greatly reduced the number of inhabitants. It is claimed that 200,000 Syrians perished from starvation during the siege a few years ago.

Since the termination of the War, Beirut is the Capital of what is called the "Grand Lebanon." This city has a population of 130,000, of whom about 40,000 are Christians, including 10,000 immigrant Armenians. The bulk of the population, of course, is Mohammedan.

DISCRIMINATION IN RELIEF

In all Syria there are some 40,000 refugees, among whom the Near East Relief Association has been very active. The writer made inquiry concerning the charge of discrimination against Catholic Armenians and Syrians, of which that organization was accused, and learned that there was much truth to the accusation. It so happened that the men, who were working for the Near East in Beirut, were, in most instances, preachers, who made their work missionary. This organization has recently consented to pay \$5.00 a month each towards the support of 150 Maronite boys in separate Catholic orphanages if its funds warrant such expenditure. Even as late as this year, 1924, there were 15,000 refugee Armenians in Damascus, cared for by the Near East in tents, orphanages, and homes. The local Catholic clergy declared that the Armenians, who are united with Rome, received scarcely any help. On the other hand, the Catholic Bishop of Constantinople said that he had little reason to complain about the Near East in his region.

Today the Near East conducts six orphanages in Syria and five in Palestine. The total number of orphans is 8,500. It claims to support 3,000 more in the Caucasus and Greece.

All the Maronites, about 125,000 in number, are Catholic. Before the War there were 200,000 of them in Syria. In addition, there were 10,000 Uniate Greeks, 10,000 Armenians, and more of the Orthodox Greeks and Armenians. The Maronite population is estimated at 1,800,000. Damascus is the place of St. Paul's conversion, and the house of Ananias, who baptized him, still stands, and is fitted for a chapel. The street on which it is located, is still called "Straight," as it was in St. Paul's day (Acts 9:11). The wall over which St. Paul was let down in a basket is also preserved to this day. Damascus was also the home of St. John Damascene, and a portion of his dwelling is still in fairly good condition. Armenian priests expect to build a church which will incorporate the walls of the Saint's hand. Today Damascus is a very uninviting city, though its situation is most beautiful. It has as many Mosques as there are days of the year.

CHURCH PROGRESSING IN SYRIA

The Catholic Church is making some progress throughout Syria, while the Orthodox Greek is losing. Protestantism had hoped to win favor through war relief work, but it did not succeed in any religious way. In the eyes of the people it has received credit for nearly all material assistance rendered.

At Beirut there has been a huge Protestant College for many years; until 1922 it was called the Syrian Protestant College, but it is now called the American University. It is a high-grade school, and is thought well of. In the same city the Jesuits conduct St. Joseph's University, which is well patronized, and a good competitor of the Protestant Institution.

The Russian Church was formerly a great benefactor to the Orthodox Greek, both in Syria and Palestine, but today no assistance comes to the Greeks from that source. Concerning the Armenians: Before the World War there were 3,500,000 of that race; while today there are no more than 2,000,000. The 1,500,000 were massacred or died of starvation. Every Catholic Armenian Bishop and priest who did not flee his country, was massacred. Only about 3% or 150,000, of the Armenians, belong to the Roman Church. The schismatic Armenians are very inconsistent in their beliefs and practices. Technically they do not believe in Purgatory, but they pray for their dead. They do not believe in the immediate bliss of the Saints, but they have Saints. They are devotees of Eutychianism, but have little conception of what it implies.

Thy pains and sickness are all cured; thy body shall no more burden thee with weakness, and weariness; thy aching head and heart, thy bungled and thirled, thy sleep and labor, are all gone. O what a mighty change is this. From the dung hill to the throne! From a vile body to this which shines as the brightness of the firmament.—Baxter.

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