

FIVE-MINUTES' SERMON.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE MALICE OF SIN.

"Make straight the way of the Lord." (John 1, 23.)

On the banks of the Jordan, the great forerunner of Christ raises his powerful voice, preaching salutary penance, to prepare the world for the coming of the Redeemer. During this holy season of Advent the Church also forcibly appeals to us for conversion, change of heart, and amendment of life, so that this, the greatest feast of religion—Christmas—will be for us all, a feast of grace and divine blessings. And, indeed, we should cheerfully listen to the voice of God as enunciated through the mouth of His Church, cheerfully open our hearts to receive His holy grace if we would only consider seriously the malice of sin and the heinous ingratitude with which we requite God's infinite love for man.

"Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear O earth, for the Lord hath spoken, I have brought up children, and exalted them, but they have despised Me. The or knoweth his owner and the ass his crib, but Israel hath not known Me, and my people have not understood." (Isaiah 1, 3.)

Alas! cannot this sorrowful complaint be also applied to us? Answer me, O sinner, is not God your father? Has He not created you and brought you forth from nothingness? Has He not watched you as the apple of His eye, protecting you in a thousand dangers of body and soul? Does not every piece of bread which you eat come from Him? Are not all things, whatever you have, whatever you are, gifts of His paternal love? And such a God and father you do not even desire to know, are unwilling to serve and do not wish to love!—you, His child!

He gave you commandments, not as a tyrant who enacts laws for his own benefit, but He commanded you as a father who loves you and seeks only your welfare. And you answer your God and say: "I despise your commandments, I defy your obedience, I serve You not." See, your God desires to make you happy not only here in this world but also in the world to come. Eternally, you should inhabit the heavenly mansions, eternally, partake of His own infinite glory, clothed in resplendent effulgence, chanting before His throne the glorious Alleluia. But you, ungrateful wretch, say to your God: "I renounce His glory, I will have no part in it." God threatens you with hell, an abode of woe and despair. "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished," where the smoke of their torments shall ascend up forever and ever, neither have they rest day nor night." And you, insolent wretch, answer God by your impudence: "I scorn Thy threatenings, I defy Thy threats, I will not cease to be Thy adversary and will continue to despise Thee."

But to save you from sin and the everlasting flames of hell, the only begotten Son of the eternal Father descends from the throne of his majesty, descends into this valley of tears, is laid in a manger. During thirty three years He permits Himself to be scorned and reviled by His murderers and, at last, sacrifices His life for you, shedding His precious blood and dying in torment for you on the cross. Could the God of infinite love do more for you, in order to move your heart to reciprocate His love? And you, O hardened sinner, instead of showing your gratitude and love to Jesus, enter the ranks of His murderers and trample upon His precious blood. By every mortal sin you commit, you take up the scourge, the crown of thorns, the nails that pierced His hands and feet and renew His sufferings and bitter passion. O detestable ingratitude, which no words can describe! Has any one saved you from life or your liberty by means of expending a few dollars, you would be grateful to him during the remainder of your life. Your God, however, has saved your soul from hell, by shedding His own precious blood and by giving up His life for you, and you have no love, no gratitude for Him, nothing but scorn, contempt and shameful insult. Ah, has not our Lord just cause to speak to you through the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah: "I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised Me." (Is. 1, 3.)

Notwithstanding the greatness of your iniquity, God did not cease to be your father. He could have annihilated you, could have cast you into hell, but still He spared you. He could have abandoned you, as you have abandoned Him, but He did not do so: on the contrary, He waits not seriously to reflect and see if you will not seriously reflect and turn from your evil ways. God not only awaits you, but, like a compassionate Father, He follows you, His prodigal son, in your evil ways and pleads with you to return and to save your soul by penance. He assures you by His divine word that He will not let the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. He opens His arms to embrace you, to give you the kiss of peace and to press you to His paternal bosom, to restate you into the father's house and into the fellowship of heaven. Yes, even the angels in heaven are awaiting your return and penance, to celebrate a festival of rejoicing.

O sinner, let your heart be touched and spurn no longer God's infinite love and mercy. Return to your heavenly Father by a true conversion and earnest amendment of life. By a good confession, become again a child of God and an heir of heaven. Let us not

forget, my dear brethren, that we are all poor sinners, and hence without exception let us implore God's forgiveness and mercy for our sins. Let us resolve, by a life of fidelity in the service of God, to make satisfaction for our former transgressions. Let us battle in earnest against the devil, the world and concupiscence; let us wage war against all evil inclinations and wicked passions, make straight every thing that is crooked in our heart, and plume all that is rough, so that according to the promise given in the gospel of this Sunday, we shall see the salvation of God. Amen.

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS.

The Raven's Message.

"What can be keeping Pierre so late to night?" said a stout, sunburned woman, with a colored handkerchief around her head, who was standing at the door of a log hut, on a small rocky islet in the middle of the Rhone. "I do hope nothing has happened to him: he's so terribly venturesome since he got a boat of his own."

"Pooh, pooh!" answered her husband cheerily. "He'll come back all right; never fear. It's only proper that my boy should be a ferryman like his father. And so he must learn to manage a boat betimes. See, yonder he comes, rowing like any boatman!"

"But whatever has he brought with him?" cried Madame Lenoir, in amazement.

"What, indeed? At first sight, the sturdy little twelve year old, who came skimming toward them across the broad, shining stream, appeared to be wearing a huge, black overcoat, torn almost in two. But a second glance showed the strange object to be a raven nearly as big as himself, which hung loosely over his shoulder, as if either dead or badly hurt."

"See what I've got, mother!" cried he, gleefully. "I found it in the wood yonder, with its wing broken. At first it snatched at me, and wouldn't let me touch it, but it's quite enough now. Isn't it a fine big one?"

"O, you dreadful boy!" cried his mother. "What do you think we're going to do with a great, ugly thing like that about the house? And who's going to feed it, pray?"

"Why, mother, you know you always say that this house of ours on the island is just like an ark; and Noah had a raven in his ark that he used to send flying about, and why shouldn't we? Besides, we can teach him to carry messages for us, like that one that Father Gregoire told us about the other day."

"Well, there's something in that," said Jean Lenoir, laughing; "and as for feeding, a raven can pick up its own living any day; and besides, we have always plenty of odds and ends of fish. Bring him in, my boy, we'll see what can be done with him."

The broken wing soon healed, and in a few months Pierre's raven—named "Christopher" in honor of the ferryman's patron saint—had become famous throughout the whole country side. Many a bright silver franc did Pierre pick up at the country fairs by making the bird go through the tricks he had taught it; and when once it had learned to carry messages, the people along the river gave it so many that the post-man used often to threaten it jokingly with a summons before the magistrate for taking away his business.

Even Pierre's mother got reconciled to the "great, ugly thing" at last; more especially as the good priest of the parish, Father Gregoire, was very fond of it, and never came to see them without bringing something good in his pocket for "our friend Christopher."

Sometimes, indeed, as soon as the kind clergyman's black cassock and broad hat were seen on the opposite bank, little Pierre would point thither, and call out: "Food, Christopher!" And the raven, shooting like an arrow across the river, would perch on the priest's shoulder, and thrust his great black bill into the old man's pocket in search of the food which he was always sure to find there.

So matters went till one night in the early spring, when Jean Lenoir, coming home tired after a hard day's work, paused for a moment as he got out of his boat, to notice a strange, leaden dimness that overhung the hills along the eastern sky.

"It must be raining hard up in the mountains," said he to himself, and then thought no more about it. But at daybreak next morning he was awakened from a dream of being at sea in a storm, which seemed strangely real even after he was broad awake. Doors were banging, windows rattling, timbers creaking and groaning, mingled with a roaring and dashing as if a Niagara had been let loose close to his ear. Hardly knowing what he did, he sprang to the door and threw it open, and instantly started back as if he had been shot.

The water was within a foot of the door still! It was plainly rising higher every moment. The Rhone, swollen by the heavy rains and the sudden melting of the mountain snows, had burst its banks and come down in full flood, driven by such a gale as had not blown in those parts since the great storm ten years before. All sorts of things went whirling past on the yellow foam—drowned sheep, hurdles, beams, boxes and uprooted trees, upon one of which crouched a poor little shivering dog, wailing piteously for help that no one could give.

Jean's first thought was for his boat; but both it and the shed in which it was moored was gone as if they had never been. Sick at heart he clam-

bered up into the loft after his wife and son, just as the water came flooding in over the door sill.

Meanwhile an anxious crowd had gathered on the opposite bank, eager to help the imperiled family on the island. But how was this to be done? No boat could live in that boiling flood, and it seemed hopeless to think of getting a rope across.

The strongest man could not fling a stone so far. A kite would be instantly torn to shreds by the wind, and they had no means of sending across either an arrow or a bullet.

Poor Father Gregoire ran wildly from man to man, imploring them to save his friends, and meeting every-where the same despairing shake of the head. And still the water rose higher and higher, and higher.

Suddenly Pierre put his mouth close to his father's ear and screamed with all his might through the deafening roar:

"Father! Christopher!"

Catching his son's idea in a moment, the ferryman hastily rummaged out a roll of stout twine, one end of which he knotted to a strong rope, while Pierre fastened the other round the leg of his bird, which was, indeed, about to become in terrible earnest what they had often called it in jest, "the raven sent forth from the Lord."

"Food, Christopher!" shouted the boy, pointing to the opposite shore; and instantly the raven outspread its broad, banner-like wings, and flew forth into the storm, while a stifled cry broke forth from the gazing crowd as they watched its flight.

Twice all seemed lost, as poor Christopher was almost beaten down into the raging waters beneath; but the brave bird persevered, and catching a momentary lull in the fury of the storm, struggled across the deadly space, and fell exhausted upon the bank.

A stout farmer sprang forward to seize the cord tied to the bird's leg, and instantly half a dozen eager hands were at work hauling in the rope at tached to it. Communication being thus established with the island, the rest was easy; and in less than half an hour three Crusoes in the ferryman's boat were drawn safely ashore, just as the house fell crashing into the swollen river, which whirled away the strong timbers like straws.

After this the bold raven became a greater favorite than ever, and from that day everyone called him "Christopher the Courier."

CHATS WITH YOUNG MEN.

Unless a young man becomes master of himself, he will be the worst of failures. For the complete wreck of a human being is to be the willing and hopeless slave of the lower nature, given over to the weakness of the flesh. His own worst enemy is from within—his lower self—and he had better start out with the conviction that his soul must conquer his body or his body will likely conquer his soul.

Master of Himself.

Dean Farrar, in a brilliant article on "The Young Man—Master of Him self," writes: "By 'self-possession,' in common speech, is merely meant that a man does not exhibit outward signs of emotion or alarm at any sudden crisis; that he is master of all facial expression; that he can conceal the agitation or excitement which is shown by others. And when society speaks of a young man being 'his own master,' it only means to say that he has a private income of his own and can do what he likes!"

But the true conception of "self-possession" and "being one's own master" so far from these things on the surface, are connected with the very depths of our human nature.

Our nature is not simple, but complex; and its perfectness and blessedness consist in the harmonious interrelation of its tendencies and forces. We have acquired ourselves when we have learned to give the supremacy to what is best and most eternal within ourselves, and to keep in resolute control all base and destructive elements within us.

This truth forced itself even on the pagan moralists, and was seen with marvelous insight especially by Plato. He described a man as a tripartite being, consisting of the combination of a lion, a many headed monster and a man. The lion represents the passions of the soul—not necessarily ignoble, but liable to become ungovernable and then destructive. The monster—a multitudinous polycephalous beast, having a ring of heads of all manner of beasts, tame and wild—represents the lusts of the flesh. The man represents the reason. Nothing, says Plato, is more fatal than "to feast the multitudinous monster and strengthen the lion, but to starve and weaken the man. The human being has only achieved his true destiny when the man is absolute sovereign over the lion, controlling all its impulses, and when he has crushed the many headed monster beneath his feet. But it is only the few who do not allow the lion and the monster to overthrow and tyrannize over the reason—and then the man becomes earthly, animal, demoniac."

Practically, then, every man is living in one of three conditions: (1) that of defeat, (2) that of uncertain struggle, or (3) that of secure victory. 1. The condition of absolute human defeat presents the spectacle which comprises in itself all the most terrible tragedies of our earthly life. It has many degrees; it may not always imply a hopeless abjectness, but it exists whenever a man has allowed himself to become the slave of his lowest, and

especially of his animal impulses. Well may Shakespeare exclaim:

"Give me that man / That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him / In my heart's core, yea, in my heart of heart!"

Many a man is nothing more or less than "passion's slave"; and there is no servitude more grinding or more disastrous. The duty imposed on us, by nature, by reason, by conscience, by Scripture, by every voice of God without us and within, bids us fight against our evil passions and make them "come to heel by a strong will, the servant of a tender conscience."

The man who tampers with who makes concessions to his lower instincts is lost. For we are, as Aristotle said, naturally "prone to over-indulgence rather than to moderation." The only way to master ourselves is to resist the beginnings of evil; to strangle the evil inclination at its very source; to crush the unborn serpent in its gleaming shell. If we dabble with it, if we parley with it, if we pamper the devil within us, nothing but a miracle of grace can save us. We cannot make harmless "covenants with death," or safe "agreements with hell."

For instance, the experience of the world shows the enormous strength of sensual impulses; yet no human being was ever born who could not have lived, as hundreds of thousands have lived, a life pure and temperate. But the condition of doing so is resistance; it is to harden ourselves against ourselves; it is to avail ourselves of the divine grace which is freely and always within the reach of all who seek it. If a man thinks that he can plunge into the rushing and whirling stream and not be swept away by it—that he can walk in the dark along the edge of the precipices and run no risk of a shattering fall—that any drowsy band will be strong enough in which to check his full-fed appetites when they crash out upon him, "terrible and with a tiger's leaps," he will find, by fatal experience—renewed to the human race since the day of

that crude apple which perverted Eve—that to encourage temptation is to abandon the true mastery of self. How can he escape impurity who listens to, and is ever receding to his self polluting imagination, the Siren's song? who thinks that he may safely define the inner sanctities of his moral being, and yet not do so by outward act? who by impure literature, and every other form of unwholesome stimulus, feeds and strengthens the very passions which can only be tamed into temperance, soberness and chastity by rigid avoidance, or determined battle?

Or take the awful desecration of drunkenness. Can there be a more abjectly pitiable spectacle, can there be a more fearfully dismantled bulk on the rolling waters, or a more ghastly wreck upon life's lonely shore—than the habitual drunkard? He cannot resist a chemical product, he has made himself the slave of a dead thing; he has impawned that which is divine within him to the meanest and lowliest of all the fiends. "If the glass of brandy were there—such a miserable being has been known to say—"and between me and it blazed up the fires of hell, I am so helpless that I should still be forced to put out my hand and take it."

The second and perhaps the commonest condition, is that of undecided struggle. The man who has suffered the wild beast of the flesh to make its thick carnivorous roar heard within the sanctuary of his soul—the youth who has played longingly with the glittering venomous language which shall soon break into a fiery flying serpent—the man who, wittingly or unwittingly, has given to the evil one a right and a part with him, and forfeited his part in the Lord Jesus Christ—that man has disturbed within him the indestructible autonomy of righteousness. He has rendered his task very perilous in the warfare which has no discharge. It is infinitely easier to stand firm than to restore a battle array which has once wavered and been gored by inroads of the enemy. It is far easier to win the battle than to check the rout. This was the fatal experience depicted by St. Paul.

"To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. So the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. With the mind I serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Rom. 7, 18-25.)

It is the confession of Ovid: "Video meliora, probaque, Deteriora sequor."

It is the exclamation of Louis XIV: "I know those two men," when Masiellon had been depicting the old man and the new man who exist within each of us. All men must feel that though "the angel holds us by the hand," yet "the serpent has the painful heart." This explains the painful phenomenon of inconsistency. It accounts for the sudden conduct of men who had passed for good. It accounts for the frequent phenomenon of sudden exposure and ruin in the case of men who, all their lives long, had seemed to be walking in the odor of sanctity.

In many a man there are those two men—the Adam and the Christ. He seemed me thought to live two lives in one:

One lived still with matter to be done, While one apart sat on a sunny tower Watching the moral world."

And thus, in the quaint words of Tennyson:

"One lived still with matter to be done, While one apart sat on a sunny tower Watching the moral world."

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