

FIVE-MINUTE SERMON

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST

FORGIVENESS

"If thou offendest thy gift at the altar, and thou shalt remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave thy gift there before the altar, and go first and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

When our Lord told us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." He prescribed for us a sure way of obtaining the forgiveness of our own sins.

If we could come before God in sorrow and say to Him in a penitential spirit: "O Almighty and just God, yet always my most merciful Father, behold me, a sinner, craving pardon of Thee. Look into my heart and see that I have already forgiven those who have offended me in thought, word and deed, and I would wish also that thou wouldst forgive them as I have done me, as well as to forgive them—I say, brethren, that if a sinner comes to confession in that frame of mind, he may come with the greatest confidence that God will surely do the same for him; his sins will be all immediately forgiven, and as it were, forgotten for ever. As God Himself expresses it in Holy Scripture: "I will not remember his transgressions for ever."

I know that there are a good many people who don't fancy this way of preparing themselves for confession and absolution. They think to appease the anger of their offended God by a good deal of talk about their being "ever so sorry"—accompanied, it may be, by a few sighs and sobs and tears when they mention their own sins. But if the priest applies the doctrine of the Gospel, and tells them to leave their gift of sorrow and tears before the altar and first go and be reconciled with those with whom they are at variance, and then come and offer their gift and get a good absolution, he finds that the sorrowful penitent has suddenly changed into a lawyer who is strong in special pleading, with more reasons why he ought not, should not, and could not do anything of the kind than the priest could reply to in a day's time.

Suppose the priest was to say: "Very well, how your head, make your act of contrition, and I will give you as good an absolution as you have given your enemy," do you think he would be satisfied with that? By no means. He would know that the priest was mocking him, and that such an absolution would be worthless.

But you see that it would be in perfect accordance with the doctrine of the Christian Gospel. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." He is getting as good as he gives. Remark the condition—"as we forgive." Not "more easily than we forgive," nor "whether we forgive or not," but plainly and honestly, "just as we forgive those who trespass against us." If, then, we want and hope to get a whole absolution that wipes out everything, and leaves our souls at peace, free from all guilt and debt to Divine Justice, we must do unto others as we would have God do unto us, and first give our enemies, if we have any, a whole absolution that leaves out all our anger, all our grudge and desire of revenge.

"But, your reverence, it is quite different with God. It is so easy for God to freely forgive, and it is so hard for our poor human nature." What, that you say? Easy for God to forgive? Yes, but it cost Him the death of His Divine Son on the cross that it might be easy for Him. If you will try to be a little more like the God you believe in, and learn to practise some sacrifice and self-abandonment and self-surrender, you will find it easy also. And now, in the name of Him who died on the cross for your forgiveness, I charge you to examine your conscience on this matter before your next confession, and if it pleases God to send you a sickness or misfortune or other cross in the meantime, accept it in union with your Lord's sufferings, and you will experience a wonderful power to bear with others' faults and sins, and to banish all rancor and bitterness from your heart, and I promise you there will be no difficulty about your absolution when you come to confession.

"THE ANGEL OF THE LORD"

The May number of the Lamp records an extraordinary incident in the life of the late Bishop King of Lincoln, England. It appears that soon after his ordination the young clergyman was sent for to visit a man in a parish, who, the messenger said, was seriously ill. It was a country parish, the night was dark and the way lonely, but the young curate at once answered the summons and entered on a walk of some two miles to the house of the dying man. When he reached the house, no light was burning, and, in answer to his knock, he was told there was no one sick within and that no one had sent for him. Puzzled and perplexed, he retraced his steps, wondering if he had misunderstood the messenger. Years passed, and with the passing years the memory of that lonely visit had almost been forgotten.

When the young curate had in time become a bishop, he visited a man in the prison of his diocesan city sentenced to death for murder. When the bishop was about to leave the cell of the condemned man he was detained by the prisoner, who said to him: "Do you remember the dark night many years ago when you were summoned to visit a dying man, and when you came to the house you found no sick man?"

"I do," answered the bishop.

"Do you think you would now know the man who knocked at your door that night, and sent you out into the darkness?"

"I do not think I would."

"Well, I was that man who asked you to tramp the lonely road, and I intended to rob you on the way."

"Why, then, did you not attack me?" asked the bishop. The reply was extraordinary:

"I don't know. I was afraid and let you pass, determined to swaggle you on your return; but as you passed on your way back the place where I was hiding, I saw that you were not alone."

"But I was alone," spoke back the bishop.

"No, you were not. You were not

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alone. There was with you a tall, blue-looking man, who walked beside you till you entered your house, and then disappeared. My chance was gone, and I never again troubled you."

"Can it be," asks the Lamp, "that in that dark night the Angel of the Lord walked with him and made the fact known?"

Why not? Did not the Angel Gabriel accompany the young Tobias to Ecbatana and see him safely back to his father? Does not Jacob tell us of "the angel who had delivered him out of all dangers," and does not the Psalmist, in several places, mention angels as protectors of the righteous? This was the common belief of the Jews in our Saviour's time. Our Lord tells us not to despise His followers, "because their angels continually behold the face of their Father who is in Heaven." Both the Jews and Gentiles believed that particular angels were assigned to guard good men, and had the care of their conduct and protection. Hesiod, one of the most ancient Greek authors, records the tradition among the nations that there are:

"Aerial spirits, by great dove designed, To be on earth the guardians of mankind."

And does not Plato tell us (de Legibus, lib. x.) that "every man has his own guardian angel (daemon) prompting him to good?"

Did not an angel speak to Moses in the bush, deliver the law to him and guide his people in the wilderness? And does not the Church in that beautiful prayer—taught us all in our childhood—"O angel of God, to whose holy care I have been committed by the divine charity, design during this day to enlighten, to guard, to guide and protect me"—tell every child that an angel of God watches over it?

The Old and New Testaments, the literature of Rome and Greece (i.e., Socrates and his disciples), the hagiology or Lives of the Saints, and modern literature in many instances (see Life of Brougham), all bear witness to the fact that angels guard good men and women. To the man of faith and prayer, the angelic care of the young curate is by no means an exceptional occurrence. There are many, very many, who, like King, do not see the spirit which guards them, but have often, without their knowledge, been saved from injury and death by the loving kindness of God's holy angels.—Intermountain Catholic.

SPIRITISM—INSANITY

The Catholic Fortnightly Review (Philadelphia) tells us in its "first May" issue that "there is practical unanimity among all who have studied the subject (Spiritism) and have no interest to hide the truth, in saying that the ordinary order of followers of Spiritistic doctrines is the lunatic asylum." This is a daring pronouncement, but Mr. Preuss supports his declaration by citations from unimpeachable authorities, among them Dr. Forbes Wilson, who is seriously ill, saying: "Ten thousand unfortunate people are at this present time (1877) confined in lunatic asylums on account of having tampered with the supernatural. The editor also quotes from Dr. C. W. Williams' "Spiritism and Insanity—London, 1900," where it is written: "The pursuit of Spiritism is so injurious and so often produces insanity, because it weakens and destroys the will-power."

The saddest example known to us of the ravages of Spiritism on a noble intellect was that of Robert Dale Owen, Owen was an enthusiastic Spiritist, and—we hope it is permissible to say it—a sincere and devout one. When we last spoke to him, back in the seventies, he was in the evening of a long life of earnest, unselfish efforts devoted to what he thought was for the betterment of his fellow-men. His books, "Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World" and "Beyond the Breakers," were at this time very popular; so much so, indeed, that he honestly believed that Spiritism was not only a reality, but a noble discovery which would lift our

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FRANK JOHNSTON, FORMER ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF MISSISSIPPI, TELLS WHY HE BECAME A CATHOLIC

Mr. Frank Johnston, a prominent lawyer and former attorney-general of Mississippi, after many years of happiness in the Catholic Church, has just given to the public an outline of the mental process which finally led to his submission to the See of Peter. The brochure entitled "My Road to the True Church" is issued by the International Catholic Truth Society of Brooklyn.

Unlike most accounts of conversions, Mr. Johnston's article scarcely touches upon matters of family, personal details and outside influences. It is the calm, cool, accurate lawyer's statement of certain necessary principles, of the evidence at hand, and of logical conclusions resulting therefrom.

Mr. Johnston comes of an old Southern family. He served all through the Civil war and during the past thirty years he has held many positions of trust and distinction. There was nothing in his early life that might tend to attract him toward the Catholic Church. His father, mother and relatives were all Protestants and his associations and surroundings were entirely non-Catholic. In fact, they were somewhat anti-Catholic.

In 1875 Mr. Johnston began to study the Church, from the lawyer's point of view, and soon, like many other seekers for the truth, he was drawn toward the Church by a clearer insight into her satisfying systems of philosophy. A more intimate knowledge showed him that the Church was totally different from the sects by which he was surrounded, that she was jealous of truth, intolerant of error, and uncompromising in her struggle with sin. After four

years of study, research and reasoning, Mr. Johnston had the happiness of being baptized in 1879 and shortly afterwards his wife and her mother, who was the widow of Judge Gerzer, of the Supreme Court of Mississippi, were received into the Church. Mr. Johnston has now the happiness of seeing nine children and twenty-two grandchildren all worshipping at the same altar.

Lourdes Confiscated

The French government has added to its many crimes the confiscation of the Basilica of Lourdes.

How long will such sacrileges be permitted to continue? Instead of a crusade to the land of Mahomet, it would look as though one were more necessary to the land of St. Louis. The liveliest imagination of the goddess could not have conjured up a picture as drastic and as terrible as that of the present condition in France. We wonder what kind of people and what kind of Catholics there are in France who with folded arms look on at such outrageous injustice and sacrilegious confiscation of the endeared shrine, such as that of Lourdes. If there will be no interference with public worship in the sanctuary of Lourdes, the motive, we can easily surmise, is to continue the income to the state, to the railways and to the innkeepers. The cup of the iniquity of the government should now be full. Yet the government was returned to power at the last elections with Catholics in the land outnumbering all others, perhaps twenty-five to one.—Catholic Universe.

A Good Word for Mark Twain

It is unjust to say that the anti-Catholic passages in his earlier writings "will forever render infamous Mark Twain's memory." During his stay in Germany a few years ago, he became intimate with a prominent Catholic family—the husband an army officer, the wife a sister of a well-known Eng-

lish priest—and there seems to have got rid of all traces of bigotry. We do not recall anything against the Church that he afterward penned; and his tribute to Joan of Arc, as a whole, deserves to be remembered by Catholics as a work of reparation. Mark Twain was possessed of admirable qualities, and could be—often was—"as serious as a judge." A correspondent of one of the London dailies, who met him at the home of his Catholic friends in Germany, says that he impressed her as being "the most melancholy person" with whom she had ever come in contact. Catholics to whom the dead author was intimately known must have been surprised as well as pained to read in a leading Catholic journal the words which we have quoted. De mortuis, etc. And much of good might be said of Mark Twain.—Ave Maria.

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