

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. P. HICKRY, O. S. B.
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST

THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD
COMMANDMENTS

"The Lord thy God thou shalt adore, and Him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. iv. 10)

These words of our Blessed Lord, my dear brethren, remind us of the authority and power of the Commandments. They are a quotation from the words of Moses, and he gave them to the children of Israel as the words of the Almighty giving him the Law. The Commandments of the Old Law were renewed by Christ, the Son of God, in the New. They, then, have a double claim on our obedience and reverence. Stand by them, and your salvation is assured. "Thou shalt know that the Lord thy God, He is a strong and faithful God, keeping His covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments unto a thousand generations." (Deut. vii. 9.)

Yet there are men who resent them. They declare that the Commandments infringe upon their liberty; and because no immediate penalty is dealt out to them for breaking them, they deride those who keep them as being slaves to tyranny. Whereas, how thankful we should be for the Ten Commandments! God knows what is good for us; He gives us them as safeguards. True obedience costs something; but remember, obedience is always rewarded. The Commandments are an infringement on our liberty! As well say a fireguard in a nursery is an infringement on the liberty of the children! Instead, then, of resenting the Commandments, we should accept them with gratitude, and the work of our life is to keep them faithfully.

Knowledge of them, therefore, is necessary. And the more we understand them, the more we shall be led to love and reverence them.

The first three Commandments regard Almighty God: our worship for Him; our respect for His very Name; our obligation to keep holy one day each week in His honour. The first is fulfilled by our acknowledging the one true God, by adoration and worship, and turning from all others to Him alone. Prayer, then, practically is the fulfilment of it—prayer, by which we acknowledge Him Lord and Master; by which we desire His honour and glory; by which we turn to Him in all our needs; by which we ask our Father's pardon for all our shortcomings and negligences. Each day claims this time for prayer, and we cannot even limit it to certain times, for in danger and temptation we are bound to seek help and protection in prayer.

And the second Commandment hedges round the Name of God with respect and veneration. "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain; for he shall not be unpunished that takes His Name upon a vain thing." (Deut. v. 11.) This is the Commandment which is broken, more than any other, for nothing! In laughter, in a joke, in surprise, as a mere exclamation, the sacred Name of God, the sacred Name of Jesus, is drawn down by young and old alike in vain. But how much more terrible, when greed, drink, rage, revenge, burst out into oaths and curses and blasphemies. Any exclamation can show your anger; why offend the Almighty by dragging down His sacred Name? Check yourselves, lest you give bad example by such words. The habit is soon learned, and seldom overcome. What a judgment awaits those who contaminate the young! "He shall not go unpunished."

Impressive is the wording of the Third Commandment: "Remember thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day." God demands this observance from us, week after week. By observing it, we acknowledge that we are His servants and His children; we bless Him for the Redemption He has granted us; we draw down His graces and blessings on our souls. And those who do not remember? Those who forget and willfully neglect—what of them? They insult the great God by their disobedience and contempt. Their forgetfulness even is no excuse, for they are commanded to remember!

And how are we to keep the day holy? So that there should be no error or mistake about this, the first Precept of the Church lays down: "To keep the Sundays and holidays of obligation holy by hearing Mass and resting from servile work." And the Catechism declares it a mortal sin to neglect Mass on these days. And we are bound to obey the Church and accept its ordinances, for Christ has said: "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me." (Luke x. 16.) There are certain valid reasons, excusing from Mass and allowing work. In certain employments, to prevent grave loss, the work, of a necessity, has to be continued on Sundays. In those cases the workmen are free from sin, both in labouring and in missing Mass. Again, the sick, those nursing the sick, those dwelling too far off, are free from the obligation of Mass. But we have to be on our guard against laxity, against opening the door too wide to excuses and pleas; else laziness, unwillingness, neglect even, dress themselves up in a cloak of some kind of excuse.

It is sad to see how easily the habit of missing Mass can be acquired. How the conscience becomes torpid, and never gives any sign of fear or remorse for the dreadful sin. No wonder their souls are dead, for they

stay away from that which would give them life. It is the cry, wrung from the Sacred Heart of Jesus by those who miss Mass: "You will not come to Me that you may have life." (1 John v. 10.)

How can such neglect be accounted for? Do they know their obligation? Yes. Do they believe in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and understand it? Yes. Any excuse is made—you know what frivolous ones—but the reason, not the excuse, is their insolent indifference to God. They have learned to have no respect for Him, no care, no love, no fear. St. Paul cries out to them: "O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. iii. 1.) This is what takes place at every Mass, but they care not.

My dear brethren, reverence Holy Mass all the more devoutly yourselves. Pray for those who neglect it. Let your prayer be: O Lord, "look not on the stubbornness of this people, nor on their wickedness and sin." (Deut. ix. 27.)

TEMPERANCE

THE THIRD TABLE TO THE
LEFT

"Make mine a whisky and soda, strong on the whisky," drawled the boyish looking young man in a collarless silk shirt and Palm Beach trousers.

"A lemonade for mine," said his more conservatively attired companion across the table.

An amused expression crossed the face of the boy. "Lemonade!" he said with half a sneer. "Why don't you order a man's size drink?"

"By what standard do you measure your drinks to label the one you have ordered 'man's size' and mine something else?" smilingly asked the more serious man.

"Now don't come that big brother stuff on me, Will. I don't drink too much; I know when I have enough; I can quit any time I want to. I can."

"Why haven't you done it?" "Because I have a right to drink if I want to. Big men have always drunk. Washington, Lincoln, Grant, these were not total abstainers by a long shot. Times are no different now. Why, there are a dozen representative men in this room. Look around you."

"In the past, I'll admit," commented the man from whose countenance all sign of laughter had disappeared, "drinking was quite common. But to-day the habit is not nearly so general."

"What makes you think that?" "Not because men are any better morally, mentally or physically," went on the more serious one, ignoring the question, "but simply because they are finding out that drinking hurts their business."

"That's not true," retorted the boy with a whisky glass in his fingers. "An open town is a busy town. Ask any man."

"Credit, Bob, is the basis of all sound business," went on the other. "Only a man who is thoroughly honest makes a good customer. Going a little deeper into the question, anything that lessens a man's mental, moral, or physical strength decreases his value as a credit risk."

"Will, you're away off there. Many a deal, a big deal, has been put through across a café table." The younger man was evidently pleased at his opening.

"I am not going to mention swindles and fakes, Bob," Will said, studying the face of his companion. "I know that you are serious. You have seen this sort of thing so long that you think that it is—well a national institution—this liquor traffic. But, tell me, would you, for instance, buy a diamond or a car from a man in a café?"

"No, I don't think that I would." "Would your father employ that young fellow in the grey suit at the table over there to work in his office? He is the best trained office man in town."

Bob was silent.

"Now, you, even more than that youngster, have services to sell. Older men are constantly watching you, constantly passing judgment on your every little act. The glass of whisky that Mr. Adams of the First National sees you drink, harms you in his estimation far more than it affects you physically."

"Will, Bob exultingly exclaimed, 'look over at the third table to the left. There's Adams drinking a whisky.' There was real admiration in the eyes of the boy. "You see you're wrong, dead wrong. Waiter! tapping the bell, 'bring me another whisky, a big one.'"

"Make mine a lemonade," Will added quietly, his eyes on the third table to the left.—My Message.

EVANGELIZING SOUTH AMERICA

The American Israelite contains a good paragraph about the propaganda against Latin Americans that is popular in some sections of our country:

"If love of truth did not count with us, which we are far from insinuating, ordinary Yankee business shrewdness ought to induce us to discourage the bigoted propaganda against Latin Americans and the Catholic faith which they profess. For the rest, the shameful tactics to which some of the sects resort in their attempt to 'evangelize' South America, are a sad commentary on the spirit of Christian charity, which

is supposed to be the actuating motive. There are plenty of pagans in the world to be converted to Christianity, and efforts in the latter direction would be a more creditable performance than the attempt to alienate South Americans from their Catholic faith by having recourse to slander and misrepresentation."

Indeed, there are a number of pagans in the United States awaiting the zealous ministry of those who are so concerned about South Americans. The problem of empty pews in non-Catholic churches might be solved before an attempt is made to carry the torch of enlightenment to the people south of the Canal zone.—America.

THE "MOVIES"

THE PHYSICAL AND MORAL
DANGERS TO CHILDREN

Max Drennan in an article that appeared recently in the Irish Monthly draws a picture for us of the physical and moral dangers to children that are the results of promiscuous and unguarded attendance at moving picture shows. Although this account and statistics have reference to conditions in the British Isles they can very well apply here where possibly the moving picture has become a larger part of our social enjoyment. He says:

Even with the decent cinema there are evils to be guarded against: To say nothing of physical danger to the eyesight—a not uncommon experience—there are psychological dangers ahead for those, more especially for the young, the adolescent and the less stable minded, who haunt cinemas. The rapidity and quick change of sense stimulus, the ocular whirligig misnamed life on which the spectators try to concentrate eyes and thoughts, the dissipation of attention, all this has a similar effect upon the mind to that caused by the abuse of reading.

There are, we know, people whose minds are always in a fever, because they devour books with the greatest rapidity without chewing or digestion. It is a bad habit which grows upon the sufferer like the opium or morphia habit. It tends to morbidity, to seclusion from one's fellows, to living selfishly apart from the realities of life in an illusory world of false values. Real thought or meditation becomes painful, seriousness and collectiveness impossible, flippancy and sentimentality a habit. And the more sentimental a person is, the more lustful.

The conclusion is that the cinema habit may in itself be a danger to unstable minds, especially to the neuritic. Steadily gazing upon an illuminated disk in or out of a cinema, if persistently indulged in, may lead to dangerous auto-hypnotic states in which suggestion is too readily responded to. If the mind is allowed to slip the reins too long and too often, whether by overreading, poetizing, philosophizing, cinematicizing or what not, there is always danger of mental or moral trouble.

"The lunatic, the lover and the poet are of imagination all compact," and they must keep the reins well in hand.

The darkness of cinemas is often a cover for evil. The remedy here is obvious, as there is no necessity for the darkness. Local authorities can insist upon reflecting lamps of such power being used that a well-lighted hall need not interfere with the picture upon the screen.

The educational value of the cinema is minus zero. The diligent pupil in average hall has to breathe bad, sometimes fetid air; his eyes are dazzled by a too rapid succession of a caricature of life lived breathlessly and incoherently in a geographic jumble of countries; his eyesight is injured and his power of forming orderly mental pictures or of fixing his attention on the realities of life is impaired if not ruined; by the comic films his instinctive feelings of reverence of what is pure and holy are often sapped and an undesirable amative precocity stimulated.

Any film is bad which familiarizes the mind with immoral, criminal, revolting or morbid sights and thoughts. No juvenile audience should be allowed to witness a scene of horror. It is bad for the health and for the minds of young children to let them be unduly excited, stimulated or depressed.

On many of the boards near the cinematograph theatres, beneath the sensational programs are written such words as 'nerve thrilling,' 'eye-opener to-night,' and when we turn to these programs we cannot help noticing that it is the horrible that draws. 'Massacre; a terrific tragedy, 2,000 feet,' etc.

"I spoke to a boy about twelve years old who had attended a cinematograph show in a little country town a week or two ago, and he positively trembled as he reported what he had seen. He said, 'I shall never go again. It was horrible.' He said, 'I saw a man cut his throat.'"

Canon Rawnsley, in the article from which I have just quoted, writes of a child who had witnessed the sensational pictures, now the feature of nearly every cinema, waking up from its sleep the whole night through with screams and cries. He writes of boys being familiarized with the possibilities of a life of crime by seeing "clever burglars" and the like exhibited. Sympathy is aroused for the criminal hero and his hair-brained escapades, and the imitative faculties so strong in the young are at once aroused.

"The film manufacturers have invaded the most holy mysteries of our religious faith." This is a bad phrase. Under cover of religion a sentimental religiosity is appealed to for the sake of coining money. The film has invaded the Holy Temple and can only be scourged thence. Not only is the sacred person of the Redeemer of the World travestied upon the screen, but even where there can be recognized a seriousness of purpose, the whole effect is spoiled by the irreverence of the surroundings or the concomitants. Soon, if it has not been done already, we shall have side by side screaming posters advertising "Scenes from the Life of Christ," and "Charlie Chaplin featured in another Howling Comic."

It is no use for the cinema manager to plead that the story has a moral ending, that crime is finally punished and virtue rewarded. This is the paralysing of the immoral literature is so often defended, and it is merely throwing dust into the eyes too ready to receive it. The point is that sympathy is raised for the evildoer, that the map of evil is clearly traced, that too often the virtuous repel by their uncanny stupidity, whereas the criminal fascinates by the readiness of his resources. The inverse moral if drawn promptly, such as: It is only bad to be caught; Greater prudence would entail immunity.

I hear from America that there is a feeling of alarm over there amongst the respectable elements of society as to the present tendencies of the "movies," as they call them. There is no possible room for doubt that much sexual depravity can be traced directly to the influence of scenes exaggerating the purely animal side of human amateness.

Such pictures begin by disgusting the innocent, adolescent mind, but soon, alas, exercise a weird, morbid fascination over it. The result here as in the field of literature, is moral shipwreck. The cinema is naturally attractive to young courting couples in our larger towns; the results are of dubious value. Vicious people and pickpockets are also attracted for commercial reasons.

Canon Rawnsley, in a valuable article, mentions that on a certain Saturday in Liverpool, 13,332 children under the age of fourteen were present at matinees alone; that boys were brought up for petty theft time after time and had stolen the money in order to secure admission to the cinema; that the Liverpool Committee of Licensing Magistrates decided that the censorship of films for adults did not go deep enough for children, whose presence should be allowed only at exhibitions of special films and under special restrictions as to time; and that the hall where the performance takes place should not be in darkness.

"They determined that henceforth children under fourteen years should not be allowed on licensed premises (i. e., cinemas) after the hour of 6.30 p. m. unless accompanied by parents or guardians," and "in the event of any department of an elementary school being closed by reason of an infectious disease the justice might, for such periods as they thought fit, exclude all children from such licensed premises."

We can all work for this at least: That no child be allowed to see any but special films, and at a reasonable hour, and under sanitary conditions.—The Monitor.

THE THIRTY-NINE
ARTICLES

AND THE WORLD-WAR

When in 1563 the two Houses of Convocation drew up the Thirty-Nine Articles and England was Protestantized, the framers of that document little thought of the changes which were to take place in the Anglican Church and of the interpretations that were to be given to these very articles. While at one extreme the most fundamental doctrines of Christianity are denied by Anglican divines, at the other there is a constant approach to the true beliefs of the Catholic Church. Reference has already been made to the new attitude which Anglicans in England and America are assuming towards the doctrine of purgatory. Article XXII. reads:

"The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardons, worshipping and adoration, as well of images as of reliques, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God."

Place side by side with this the latest pronouncement of the Right Rev. Charles D. Williams, Episcopal Bishop of Michigan, as suggested by the clarifying experience of the world-war:

"Thousands of young lives in the very dawn of their promise are passing out daily, suddenly and unprepared, to the unseen. The world that looks on at that spectacle must renew its faith in immortality or go mad. People are following their dead into the unknown with their hearts. Even in extreme Protestant churches and families prayers for the dead are being offered. God is becoming the reality, Christ a near presence. As the veil of sense falls away men are seeing the invisible. The letters of soldiers at the front and the new poetry inspired by the War testify to this fact.

Saints, too, are honored and their images may be seen in Protestant homes and churches, nor is it any

longer considered "a fond thing, vainly invented," to erect chapels in their name in the stately Cathedral of St. John the Divine. So the light of the truth is slowly piercing the clouds of the Thirty-Nine Articles which have long shrouded from sight

the splendors of that Church which Christ built upon Peter.—America.

The Catholic Church is a city built on a hill, her unity of faith no mere embodiment in words of an abstract

idea, but as real and simple as that link of love and trust which binds children to their mother and makes of them a family.

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