

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

A LESSON FROM ST. PAUL

"And He said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (2 Cor. xiii. 4)

Any one even slightly acquainted with the life and works of St. Paul can not help admiring this great Apostle of the Lord. After his wonderful conversion on the road to Damascus, he completely gave himself up to the work of the Gospel. His labors were untiring, his zeal without bounds, and his sufferings very great. No obstacle he ever encountered could check him in his progress of evangelizing the Gentiles. One almost shudders when he reads the accounts written by St. Paul of the difficulties and dangers attending him at his work; but he is filled with great admiration for the Apostle when he realizes how courageously he met them all. His whole life, once he had received the grace of God, was a continual sacrifice.

We certainly would imagine that all these labors and sufferings for Christ strengthened St. Paul beyond measure in spiritual things. In truth they did. It could not have been otherwise with him, for his habitual correspondence with grace made of him one of God's most privileged creatures. Yet, who is there that will fail to admire the great humility of Paul and his total dependence on His Maker? As he tells us himself, when he was tempted, he sought God to help him. He trusted not in his own strength, and though he knew that he had labored faithfully for Christ and had thereby gained much merit, nevertheless he looked to heaven for the aid that he knew he needed. God urged him to trust in Him, saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee." These words made the Apostle feel even more humble, were that possible, and he cried out that he would glory in what he considered his infirmities, so that grace would dwell in him. How wisely he turned his defects into blessings for himself. The power of God could then abide with him and do its work perfectly.

Every Christian should consider well this instance in St. Paul's life, and draw from it a great lesson for himself. He should remember that God is anxious to perfect him by His grace, but He always does not find the opportunity to do so. But, why are things thus? Man certainly is tempted as St. Paul was—even more so. But what is lacking in man? There is, first of all, a lack of the consciousness of duty well done, and in the second place, an absence of the knowledge of total dependence upon God for spiritual help.

Had every Christian a conscientious conviction that he always had done his duty, God would make him feel that His grace would be at hand to strengthen him in his weaknesses yet remaining. But how few Christians there are who strive habitually and with great efforts, even at the cost of sacrifices, to live entirely for God! We have only to look about us to see the influence of the modern world which knows no self-denial. How great is the number of those who try to live as it wishes them to live, yet who, not being able to obtain honestly the means of gratifying their passions, fall still further into the mire of iniquity, in their efforts to keep up the pace they have begun. Such people know they neglect God's law and are endangering their souls; but they can not, like St. Paul, strip themselves of many earthly things, and live contented with what honest labor brings them. They must try to keep up with modern progress in everything, and not be outdone by their neighbor. Catholics, above all, should not be thus influenced; and many customs now existing among people should not be adopted by them. They, for instance, should never think of divorce, of styles unbecoming to Christian modesty, or of originality in thought regarding God. By encouraging such things as these, they will lose what opportunities they have of being enriched by God's grace.

Man is slow to realize that he can do nothing spiritually without God, yet unless he does admit this deficiency in himself, he can not be strengthened by God's grace. St. Paul rejoiced in his infirmity, in order to have a great amount of Christ's grace dwell within him. How different it is with some present-day Christians, who regret their infirmities and almost blame God because they have them. These troubles will be a blessing to them, however, if they endure them in the proper spirit and prepare themselves for the power that will strengthen them. We should not complain of our difficulties; rather should we rejoice, for we know that they can be turned into sources of great blessing. To accept them, when we do our best otherwise, is really to prize humility—one of the greatest of Christian virtues. It is also an acknowledgment of the truth before God.

Let all Christians, therefore, know and cheerfully accept their infirmities. The more they do this, the greater strength will they receive from Christ. We all have weaknesses, let us admit it, and thus obtain the power to overcome them, having done what we could

ourselves. If we do this, we may feel sure that the time will come when we fully will realize what occasions of real merit they were for us, and what reward, as a consequence, they will have brought to us.

THE APOTHEOSIS OF MECHANISM

No single event in the history of American Protestantism has been more discussed than the failure of the Inter-Church Movement within the past year. Its advent had been heralded as the dawn of a new era in the religious life of America; a new contribution, distinctly American, to the world's religious development. It promised to win back for a weakened Church an almost forgotten preeminence and power, and to reestablish a waning influence by the magic of efficiency. For the Inter-Church was novel, at least in this, that it planned to realize its purpose not by deepening faith or quickening religious fervor, but by establishing efficiency in organized religious life. It would eliminate every wasteful action and correct all duplication of effort; it would coordinate and simplify and centralize. It aimed to put business into Christianity.

Churches of the various sects heard these fine promises eagerly, and that they were earnest in their cooperation is evident from the incredibly large sums of money they pledged the movement. Not only this, but men of eminence in business and in professional life offered their services to the cause, so that the Inter-Church commanded the best in the way of an efficient personnel. Large and commodious headquarters were secured in New York City to house the venture, and the Inter-Church Movement began its career in a blaze of glory.

Suddenly the whole thing fell to the ground like a house of cards, and the Protestant world was aghast at the completeness of the failure. Some claimed that the movement was premature, or at least that it was launched with too great precipitancy. Others, more friendly, asserted the antagonism of big business was responsible for the debacle; an antagonism occasioned by an industrial investigation of the steel strike begun by the movement.

The most illuminating theory of failure, however, seems to be that propounded by the president of a non-Catholic University in his commencement address of June last, when he laid the failure of the Inter-Church Movement to its attempt to do by business methods a work that could be done only by the grace of God. Dr. Gates termed the movement, with its naive trust in organization, the "apotheosis of mechanism." Principles and methods of efficiency, perfectly feasible and successful in business matters, had been estimated as equally efficacious in the development of Christianity. This he termed a fatal mistake.

The doctor's theory, we think, explains not merely the failure of the Inter-Church Movement, but also interprets the obviously growing weakness of the Protestant Church in America. Non-Catholic religious life here has largely lent itself to a mechanical theory in the spread of Christianity. As a matter of fact, the predominant force in Protestantism today is not the Church, but an institution whose chief claim to distinction is its efficient work in establishing respectable lodging houses for young men, and providing well-equipped gymnasiums. But the Y. M. C. A.'s contribution to real spiritual life and experience is altogether negligible.

Today, as of old, it must be realized that the Kingdom of God in its growth is like a grain of mustard-seed—silent, patient, developing under the Providence of God according to the laws of its being. It must be rooted in faith and hope and charity. It cannot be stimulated by mechanical arrangements nor advanced solely by power of great wealth. Plans of organization may be so elaborate and efforts at co-ordination and simplification so successful that they defeat their very purpose where the things of God are concerned. What America needs most, is not business in religion, but more religion in business.—The Missionary.

CHURCH RE-OPENED ON SITE OF CHAPEL OF PENAL DAYS

London, January 13.—The Lancashire Catholics of Preston have just reopened their church of St. Mary at the Friargate, with which are connected some of the proudest memories of Catholicism in this most loyal of all the provincial Catholic strongholds in England. For the church is not only the oldest Catholic place of worship in the city of Preston, but it has perhaps the most ancient and certainly the most thrilling history of all the Catholic places of worship in the county of Lancashire.

The church which has just been reopened dates from 1856; but its ancestry goes back to a much older structure, an ancient barn that was used as a secret place of worship in the penal days, when Catholics had to meet for worship in the closest secrecy for fear of their lives. The old barn was the only place of worship for Catholics when to be called a Catholic meant death by all the

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horrible contrivances that a savage persecution could devise. The first church in Preston to be dedicated under the title of St. Mary since the Reformation was opened in an obscure yard, known then as Chapel Yard. This was in the year 1605, and the chapel was put up near the Friargate.

The very name goes back to old Catholic times; for this Friargate took its name from the fact that in pre-Reformation times the friars had a monastery at the rise of the hill. On this spot too a Catholic chapel was erected in 1761. But seven years later, at election time, a feathery mob, infuriated by anti-Catholic political bias, rushed on the chapel and utterly destroyed it.

But the Lancashire Catholics were not to be put down by this. They built another chapel on the site of the destroyed building, which was opened in 1793. Somehow evil days fell on it, and it was degraded from its sacred use and converted into a cotton warehouse. However, in 1815 it came again to be used for Catholic worship. It was restored but the fabric was unsound, and in a few years the roof fell in. The Church made growth, and in 1836 the little chapel was insufficient to accommodate the increasing number of Catholics. So the old steel was rebuilt, and the church which has just been reopened is the successor of the old buildings dating back to the penal days.

A HEREFORD VICAR REBUKED

Mr. Ernest Charles, K. C., Chancellor of the Diocese of Hereford, at the Consistory Court, Hereford Cathedral, on Saturday, publicly rebuked the Vicar of All Saints, Rev. A. G. M. Rushton, for an unlawful act in the parish church, consisting of the removal of a crucifix above the pulpit and substituting another without a faculty. The incident arose out of an application for a faculty for the erection of a rood, to hang at the entrance to the chancel as a war memorial, and for a mural tablet in oak, bearing the names of the fallen. There was no opposition from the parishioners.

While in the witness box the Vicar was searchingly cross-examined by the Chancellor as to High Church practices in the church.

Asked the Chancellor: Why do people in your congregation genuflect to the reserved Sacrament?—Because it is the Sacrament.

Why do you have a lamp burning over it?—To show people that the Sacrament is there.

Do parishioners when they pass near it, genuflect to it?—Certainly. Would they bow to the hanging memorial?—I should not think so.

The Chancellor while sternly rebuking the Vicar for removing and substituting the crucifix over the pulpit, accepted his statement that the rood would not be the object of superstitious reverence by his congregation. He, therefore, granted the faculty asked for.

The crime of the poor vicar was that he had removed a crucifix from the pulpit and replaced it with another. The alert and penetrating mind of the Chancellor detected in this not only disobedience to the established laws of the diocese, but—what is much more serious—a leaning towards the hated superstitions of Rome. It was for this reason the cross-examination on the genuflections to "the reserved sacrament" took place. The vicar evidently had not the courage of his convictions. He genuflected to the sacrament "because it is the sacrament."

The lesson of this episode is not far to seek. Recently churchmen, in exalted positions in the established Church of England, came together to pull down the corner stone of the Christian religion, and to tell the world that they no longer believed in the Divinity of Our Saviour. We have not read that they were censured by any ecclesiastical authority. The Chancellor of the diocese was probably too busy, seeing that crucifixes, or other such trappings of superstition, were not installed in Anglican churches, lest the purity of the Anglican faith might be tarnished by putting up the Sign of our Redemption over the pulpit.—Malvern News.

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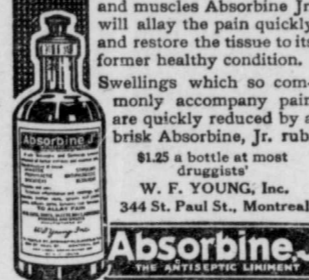
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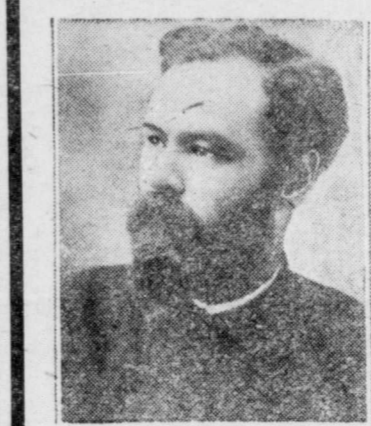
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