

**FIVE MINUTE SERMON**

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

PREPARING OUR SOULS FOR CHRIST'S COMING

"Brethren, knowing the season, that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we became believers." (Rom. xiii. 11)

The Saviour who had been promised by God when Adam and Eve were driven from the garden of Paradise, had been expected daily by the people of the Old Law long before He came. Psalmist had sung of Him and prophets had spoken of Him. All this was known to the people; yet they did not understand the real meaning of the coming of Christ, for when He came, they did not believe Him to be the Messiah. John the Baptist announced His immediate coming, and told the people how to prepare for Him. Little did they heed the Precursor of Christ, and, when the Saviour did come, they were not prepared to receive Him. The many blessings that they might have acquired, had they acted rightly and believed fully what was told them by the inspired men of God, were lost forever to them.

Now, dear friends, during this season just opening, the Church bids us prepare for the coming of the Saviour. It is true that He will not be born again, neither shall we see Him as did those who lived when He became man. But we yet may have Him come to us; we can feel His influence; and we can obtain even greater blessings than could have been obtained by those who lived before He underwent His cruel passion and death. He will come to us in spirit; and He will become the spiritual nourishment of our souls when we receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

These blessings we may receive at all times; but there are particular periods, during the ecclesiastical year, when we can receive them in greater abundance,—when, as it were, He will come to us in a special manner and fill us with more spiritual blessings and holy joys. One of these periods is now near at hand. It is Christmas time. Advent is the season the Church sets aside as a time of special preparation for these days of great blessings. She bids us become a little more serious than usual; do a little more penance than we have been accustomed to perform since Easter; and examine our conscience more perfectly, so that we may learn our faults, make a good confession of them, and, by the graces thus received, have our hearts ready for the spiritual coming of Christ at Christmas.

Let us not look upon that holy season as a time for worldly enjoyment only, as do so many people. It is true that we should rejoice then more than at any other season of the ecclesiastical year—with the exception of Easter—but our joy should be spiritual as well as human. How are we to bring this about? It can be done fully one way only—that is, by entering into this season as the Church desires and commands; namely, by making it a time of preparation for the reception of spiritual blessings.

We carry corrupt bodies that are continually causing us temptations. We often fall victims to these suggestions, and become sinners. Sometimes we sin only by single acts. At other times, these acts are repeated so frequently that we form habits which deprive us of many graces. This is the ordinary tendency of human nature; and, notwithstanding our brave efforts and earnest endeavors to overcome it, we but too often yield to it. The only way to fight it efficaciously is by prayer and mortification.

We all, no doubt, are guilty of some fault or faults, or are slaves to some one or more habits. Christmas is approaching. Christ desires at that time to be able to come into our hearts with a great supply of graces and blessings. We know that if we are found in the state in which we now are, He can not bless us as He would wish. Shall we, then, remain thus? Oh, no! There is not one of us who is not eager to do everything possible to have his heart pure, so that Christ will find a worthy dwelling-place therein.

Let us all, then, begin this work of purifying our souls, so that we may receive many blessings from God at Christmas. Can we feel really happy when that time will have come, if our souls be stained with sin? Certainly not. And will our joy be pure and full, even though we have surrounded us all that money can buy or friend can offer, if our souls, through our own fault, remain tainted? Our joy will not be entire. Nor will it be real, for true joy comes only to him whose heart is free of guilt. Let us, then, labor to make our hearts the seat of true joy, and not of a feigned worldly joy only. Christ longs for such a heart. It is his delight to enter into it. How earnestly, then, should we strive to prepare our hearts for Him during the holy days of Advent. If we do, we shall become conscious of His presence within us at Christmas, and, like the shepherds who left their flocks and came to adore Him, we shall be totally consumed with love for Him and, with hearts aglow, we shall welcome Him, fall down in adoration before His divine majesty, and shed tears of delight at His presence.

**GENERAL INTENTION FOR DECEMBER**

**THAT GOD MAY GIVE US SAINTS**

What are saints? The word is of frequent use in Holy Scripture, from Deuteronomy, where the last blessing of Moses is recorded, to the Apocalypse of St. John, where the seer beholds in vision that latter day, before the General Judgment, when Satan shall make a last, despairing assault on "the camp of the saints" (Apoc. xx. 9). Then there are the words of St. Paul, which are both a solemn warning and a call to courageous endeavor: "You are fellow citizens with the saints;" and "called to be saints."

The saints are our brethren and sisters in the faith. Some of them, as seen by St. John, are already before "the great white throne," where their prayers in our behalf are likened by him to "odors contained in golden vials." Other saints are still sojourners on earth. They may be on the pinnacle of worldly greatness, as were Edward the Confessor and the tender-hearted Margaret of Scotland, or they may be hidden in the seclusion of the cloister or the humble cot of the poor, as were Margaret Mary and Isidore the husbandman. And we, hurrying forward, or struggling onward, towards the common goal, claim spiritual kinship with them as with children of the same household.

But, after all, what are the saints? Given the plans and specifications, the mechanic follows the directions of the blue print. In the subject before us, however, we cannot ignore a feature about which the mechanic feels no concern, for the material to which he devotes his energies, whether it be solid or liquid or gaseous, offers him no resistance beyond what is contained in its natural qualities or properties, whereas the plans and specifications for the formation of a saint all imply or express the difficulties to be experienced in handling that fickle and slippery element, the human will. All else may be subjected to plane the mallet and chisel; but if the will fails to co-operate, the result of much labor may be a blotch.

While the will is drawn towards that which seems good, one must stress the words "asens" and "good;" for in them there is much room for mistake and deceit. The saints are holy, and they are holy by their nearness to the Divine Model set before them on the Mount. This, then, is a feature common to all saints: They are copies, more or less exact, more or less clear, of the Saint of saints, our divine Lord, "in whom dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead corporeally."

The saints are but copies. The Divine Original is set before them and they begin the work of reproducing it. In some saints, the work is brief, strenuous, replete with heroic endeavor and pain. They are the holy martyrs. Other saints strive courageously through weary years until, after many a telling blow, the copy meets with approval and is deemed worthy of the Divine acceptance. They are the confessors, the virgins, the holy widows.

But let us come to details; for, in this matter as in all others, there are certain fundamental rules which are common to all aspirants to membership in this school of Divine Art. The commandments of God and the precepts of the Church are the first rule for acquiring saintliness. Now, if this seems rather primitive to the eager soul, let us bear in mind that such simple rules are great helps to holiness; for, if the first meaning of each is plain and commonplace, that meaning shades off into counsels which imply exalted virtue. "Thou shalt not lie" is bald enough in its all-conscience; but praise of self and disparage of others, exaggerating and unwarranted minimizing, all cluster about that great central point of the law.

"My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel," admonished Josue. God's glory is something peculiarly His own; it is wholly divine and must not be another's. That the knowledge of God's sovereignty should reach all the children of men is a devout and helpful aspiration towards sanctity; for from this knowledge flows, as the stream from the fountain, the conviction that our whole lives are to be but an expression of our dependence on Him and of our yearning to see His divinely rightful sway universally recognized and accepted: "God over all, blessed forever."

Instinctively we turn to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our longing to see God reign over the minds and hearts of men brings before the eye of faith that wholly sacred and wholly divine mystery of God's resourcefulness, the Incarnation. A human heart throbs with love for man in that frail tabernacle now almost hidden in Bethlehem and, one day, will be exposed to the mockery of the rabble while a few will look towards that adorable Figure on Calvary while their own bleeding hearts will throb in unison with His. "The Heart that has loved men so much" makes more than a silent appeal to our hearts. It is the Heart of God. Whoever would be godlike and godly, and sanctity is but a near approach to the God of sinlessness, must know and love God's own heart.

God manifested Himself of old to Abraham, to Moses, and to the Prophets, but always in a way that,

while veiling from mortal gaze the ineffable attributes of the Godhead, spoke of His Majesty and Sovereignty and Power. But in the manifestation of His Sacred Heart, God is all tenderness, all love. "If so be you have tasted that the Lord is sweet," says St. Peter. In the mystery of the Sacred Heart, therefore, the eager aspirant to saintliness finds an object worthy of a love which, while it calls to lofty virtue, blots out sin.

To know our Divine Saviour is to know His mission; and to know that mission is to love it. His mission was, and is, the salvation of souls. A saint with no love for souls is not an undying center and source of fervor, but a poor, dead thing, a rayless sun, only a dark spot in the heavens which has and gives forth neither light nor heat.

Our Divine Saviour came with a message of self-conquest to a sensual race. Self-conquest means suffering. The saints suffered. The hardships of poverty are a severe trial; the saints bore them. The dangerous delights of the senses are hard to forsake; the saints forsook them. The contempt even of unworthy men is hard to endure; the saints endured it. Life is dear even to the poor, crawling worm; to the saints it was nothing when compared with love for God. And we, even we, with our half-hearted love for God, with our tendency to all that delights the senses, or feeds self-love, or brings a little puff of the wind of fickle popular favor, or a petty sup of the pleasantly inebriating wine of authority, are "called to be saints." "Aye, there's the rub!"

So many wicked projects come to naught, because there is no leader. Robbery and arson and treason and murder would have reduced men to beggary, would have burnt their homes over their heads, would have snuffed out human lives, would have destroyed mighty States, if only there had been a leader! Yes, even depravity, if it is to fill the foul measure of its guilt, looks about for some master mind to combine, to marshal, and to direct the forces of evil.

If the rights of reputation, property, and life itself are to be secure, they must be protected. Some leader must plan the defense; others must follow his guidance. If all the soldiers of an army act individually on their own initiative, their efficiency disappears and they sink to the state of a disorderly mob. How well this is understood in time of war! How well it is understood in everyday life among the guardians of the public peace! In any great civil disturbance, there is a cry for leaders; men of good will to follow them will never be wanting.

The interests of religion and morals antedate and surpass any mere temporal interest that can be counted at the bank, or measured in the warehouse, or weighed on the public scales. Chicanery can do away with the fruit of skill, industry, and toil, but it cannot reach the granaries of God. Though this is most true, it is, alas! only too true that chicanery can hamper or cripple the worker and hinder or harm the harvesting. The saints are our leaders. Their example heartens us. The social conditions of today are so vastly changed that they demand a change in all fields of human activity. The elements of leadership are unchanged; but the happy utilization of those elements in the living present, in which our lot is cast, calls for leaders instinct with the great principles of sanctity, with the due application of those principles to the problems of today. Our leaders are called upon to guide us, through a bewildering political and industrial labyrinth, to aid us in grappling with great social problems, to show us how to defend successfully the sanctity of the home and the helplessness of its inmates.

"The life of the saints is an efficacious intrusion in virtue," says St. Gregory the Great, "and in the means of acquiring them." They are like torches which light us along a dark and uncertain path. As there can never be too much good in the world, there can never be too many saints. If we crave knowledge, in them we find it of the highest type; for they speak to us of God and heavenly things; if we crave wealth, there is of a kind that no man can take from us; if we crave pre-eminence, theirs is such that excites no rivalries, yet outshines royal crowns; if we crave to be of benefit to our fellow-man, they point the way.

Religion cries out for saints; the home, society, and public affairs add their insistent voices. God's grace has not lost its power. What constitutes a saint, we know; how to become a saint, we know; the need for saints, we know. "This is the will of God, your sanctification," says St. Paul. And he knew.

HENRY J. SWIFT, S. J.

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