

SIX  
FIVE MINUTE SERMON  
BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOULT, D. D.  
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER  
EPIPHANY

**THE MERCY OF GOD**  
Suffer both to grow and to harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reaper: Gather up the wheat and bind the sheaves into bundles for the barn, but the wheat gather up into my barn. (Matt. XIII, 39)

What a true picture this parable of the cockle and the wheat gives us of the members of Christ's Church! The wheat, the good, the cockle, the bad, grew and flourished together. From the very beginning of its growth, the cockle could be pulled up and destroyed; but it is allowed to grow together with the wheat until the harvest time, when it will be burned. God could eject the unworthy from among the just, but He rather chooses to let them flourish along with the just until the day of reckoning, when He will administer to them their just deserts.

How true this picture is to life? We are almost amazed to see how many of the undeserving prosper and are apparently happy. Many, without an insight into God's truths and methods, are wont to complain and even doubt His justice. But this should not be so, for the world is but the soil upon which the good and the bad flourish—the former meriting and bearing fruit; the latter bringing forth fruits also, but not worthy of eternal life, and being allowed opportunity after opportunity of embracing the true faith of Christ. The time will come when justice will be rendered. Life is not the time for its evident rendition, but the end of life—the time of the spiritual harvest.

This being the case, we cannot complain of our Maker's methods. Should justice be done at present it would be necessary to destroy much cockle, to condemn many to punishment. In our charity, we should rather see this delayed, hoping in the meantime for the reform of the delinquents. God would repay, we may say, did He always, before man's span is run, exercise strict justice in his case. But since there is ever a chance for betterment, a possibility of a change of will, God waits for both. It is not His desire to destroy the sinner, but to coax him by every means to mend his ways. Were this not so, He never would have sent His divine Son, in the clothing of man, to suffer and die a cruel death, for the sinner. Man fell through his own fault, with a knowledge of his disobedience, and God must in justice demand that he return of his own free will. He can not, without destroying the nature of man, force him back to His grace. We, who are endeavoring to serve Him, do not feel instinctively the justice of His ways? The attractive power of His love is in itself almost equal to a force, and it is enough to bring back him who wishes to return to his father's home.

It is not an injustice to the just that the wicked flourish as they do, and often more so. God has provided sufficiently for all, and there is an abundance for the good and the bad. That sometimes the unrighteous rob the righteous of their wealth and possessions is not the rule but the exception. The wicked rob their kind more than they rob the good. Some, we must admit, thrive upon the poor, but poverty always does not connote justice. In fact, in this great country, of ours, it may well be doubted if those whom we call poor outshine in virtue those with a goodly share of material blessings or with means sufficient to be comfortable. There are many deserving poor, but in many cases they are deserving because of their poverty, and not because of their virtue. In our charity we should not—we do not—make this distinction, but it is mentioned to confirm the truth we are considering. We must remember that it is an eternal truth that worldly riches and material plenty are no special sign of God's favor. And those are unjust who are often heard to say that frequently God gives more to the wicked than to the righteous. Material blessings are only secondary gifts from God, except in cases where He manifestly grants them. No doubt you know of many who have come into their possessions by doubtful methods—you will not blame God for this. If you are rash enough to do so, you should for the same reason blame God for all the sins of man. Man in this world can obtain things that come from God—yes; but certain individuals have things which God never intended them to have. Certainly we can not say that they received them from God.

Our duty in reference to God and our salvation is, first of all and essentially, our individual worthiness. We must save ourselves—that is all God asks of most of us, though at the same time we also may be the means of bringing others to heaven. But our first duty, egoistical though it may seem, is our own salvation; our first responsibility is our own sanctification. It is not selfish, because when doing this we are glorifying God and serving Him—actions that keep from them even the semblance of selfishness. Nay, it is the only thing that will make us acceptable to God. He who tries to be an apostle in any sense of the word, though he exerts himself as much as human can, though he lavishes his possessions for the sake of others, unless his principal work be his own salvation, will be helped not at all by his

activities. God will hold you accountable for your own salvation first. He made you to save yourself first, and others afterwards. Had He made you as one already saved, it would be different. Had He made you primarily responsible for others first, it would be different, but He made you to glorify Him, saving your own soul first, and if possible the souls of others while saving your own.

We do not, as a rule, know the workings of God in the hearts of others. We can not tell whether they are in His favor or not. We can not see their hearts. We do not know for what reason He often acts differently with various individuals. But we can know, if we recall the fact that He is infinitely just, that His ways with all, even the greatest of sinners, are the best. It should not trouble us, disturb us, or cause us to doubt in the least, when we see the manner of His workings with some. It is only on the general judgment day that His justice will appear in all its beauty to us. In the meantime the wheat and the cockle—the good and the bad—will thrive together. He will remain unchanged. But if we are doing our duty as best we know how, we can feel certain that we are gaining merits that will crown us with glorious immortality. There are many truths even of earth that we can not understand. Shall we expect here on earth to have a clear knowledge of the truths of God—infinite truths that transcend the powers of the human intelligence? We know enough of them to save our souls, as we know sufficient of the truths of life to gain a livelihood for ourselves.

In charity we can and should pray for the cockle that seems to be flourishing, that God may change most of it and substitute wheat—the good and the just. But man is so perverse that he can not expect our Maker to forgive him without a change of heart and method. Humbly let us labor, whether living among the righteous or the unjust, for the day of the harvest will bring us a reward that will fill our every desire.

**THE RELICS OF THE SAINTS**

In general we may say that a relic is something that has been preserved from destruction; something that remains as a keepsake of one deceased. We would thus call relics; the pen used by the signers of the Declaration of Independence; articles of furniture from the home of Washington, Lincoln; guns, helmets, etc., saved from the recent World War.

A holy relic may be said to be anything that belonged to any Saint of God, now remaining with us after the Saint has departed from this life. We call it a first class relic if it is all or any part of the Saint's body for example, the head, arm, leg, finger, etc., this is a relic in its strictest sense. We refer to it as a second class relic when it is not any part of the Saint's body, but rather something that belonged to him during life; for example, clothes, books, etc.

It is spoken of as a third class relic if it is neither any part of the Saint's body, nor anything that belonged to him, but something that touched his body, either in life or after death; for example, the aprons and handkerchiefs that touched St. Paul and later cured illness.

Since the earliest days of the Church, objects closely connected with our Lord or the Saints, have been held in high veneration. The cross of Christ, His tunic, His winding sheet, the manger wherein He was laid, all these were very dear to Catholics. The very country in which Jesus lived and died, called the Holy Land, was valued highly by the Christians of the middle ages, as is proved by the crusades undertaken to rescue it. Relics were regarded with reverence by the Jews. Do we not find Moses when leaving Egypt, carrying with him the bones of Joseph? The early Catholics had great respect for the relics of martyrs and Saints. When St. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, was torn to pieces by the lions, two of his companions came in the night, gathered his bones and carried them to Antioch. In fact, abundant evidence is available to establish the custom from the earliest days of Catholicism. In a letter written by the inhabitants of Smyrna, about 156, describing the death of St. Polycarp, it is stated that after he had been burned at the stake, his disciples carried away his bones, "which are more valuable than precious stones, and laid them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, to celebrate the Birthday of his martyrdom."

From the earliest history of the Church it was customary to erect chapels or altars above the tombs of the martyrs. Even now, in the small cavity in the body of the altar, relics of two canonized martyrs are to be placed, although it was decided, February, 1906, that if the relic of but one martyr was placed the consecration would be valid. To those may be properly added, the relic of other Saints, especially those in whose honor the altar or church is consecrated, but these relics must be first class, and authenticated. By authentication, we mean, that after careful inquiry, the name of the Saint, and the seal of the Bishop are attached.

What respect are we to give these relics that are properly vouched

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For? Through the Council of Trent the Church says "that the sacred bodies of martyrs and of other Saints that are living with Christ are to be held in veneration by the faithful." We rightly honor them, the bodies of the Saints, on account of what they were, and what they will become. What were they? As the Council of Trent says, they were the living members of Jesus Christ and the temples of the Holy Ghost; they were victims acceptable to God by reason of their mortification, penance or martyrdom; they were the instruments of good works and of the most signal virtues. What will they become? Faith in the resurrection tells us that those bones, which now appear so small and so worthless, will forever be clothed with glory. As for the various objects that have belonged to Saints, we honor them as so many monuments of their virtues and as precious souvenirs of their persons, so that in honoring the relics, we honor the Saints to whom they belonged, and in honoring the Saints we honor God whose friends they are—the same God who so honors them Himself, and who commands us to honor them.

Is there anything superstitious in the proper veneration of relics? No. On the contrary, it is lawful and praiseworthy, since we do not attribute any power to the relics themselves, but to the Saint to whom the relic belonged. Do we not in our daily lives preserve with the greatest care little things that have belonged to dear and loved ones? How many of us have keepsakes that we value? Do we not respect the graves of celebrated citizens? What we do in these cases is similar to our veneration of the Saint's relics.—The Tablet.

**THE FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION**

The Feast of the Purification is associated in the popular mind with the solemn blessing of candles. The key of the liturgical significance of this blessing is found in the Nunc-Dimittis, or Song of the Prophet Simeon; especially in the words: "A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Our blessed Lord is brought before us on this day as the Light of the world, shining in the darkness of heathendom and the shadows of Judaism, the true Light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world, shining in every soul, and pointing out the way of salvation. Moreover, not by chance has the Church chosen the wax candle as a type of her Lord and Master. According to St. Anselm of Canterbury, the wax product of the virginial bee represents Christ's most spotless body, formed of the substance of His Virgin Mother: the wick enclosed in the wax and forming one with it, represents the Blessed Soul of Christ, the burning flame imagines His Divinity.

The prayers used by the Church in the blessing of the candles express most aptly and completely both the religious symbolism of the candles and the special benediction that they bring down from heaven upon those who use them with devotion. For, we should not forget that the candles blessed on Candlemas Day are not only blessed for use in Church, but also for the private use of the faithful in their homes.

First of all, every Catholic home should have its own blessed candles. One never knows when serious illness is coming. Then it is necessary to summon the priest to administer the last sacraments. There should be peace and quiet when he comes, bringing with him the Divine Guest in the Sacrament of Love, and not an uproar, searching for holy water here and candles there. A table should be placed near the sick-bed and ready with all that is needed. The priest should be met at the door with a lighted candle out of respect for the great Visitor. Old-fashioned Catholics always do that, and every good Catholic is an old-fashioned Catholic. But too many Catholics need to be exhorted again and again to do their simple duty in this respect. Ask any priest and he will tell you the old story of a hasty sick call to the bedside of a dying one and of his waiting for a member of the family

scouring the neighborhood in search for a blessed candle. Of course, the family feels mortified at having the priest waiting so long and all sorts of excuses are offered to explain the lack of candles. Either the candles were hidden away for safekeeping, or someone had borrowed them or the folks in the house had just intended to get them! Well, well, are these statements really true?

In the second place, good Catholics make an offering of candles to burn during divine services or be-

fore some shrine or statue. What a consoling thought when at your daily work that perhaps your candles are at the same time burning before the Blessed Sacrament. Again, even apart from sickness and death the blessed candle should have a place of honor in the home and be a sign of the Catholic life of its inmates. In the good old days a blessed candle was always lighted at the time of a heavy storm to beg God's protection on the home. Are you retaining this beautiful old religious custom of your father and

mother? In the Catholic Church the home is linked to the sanctuary. Religion is the everyday life, not merely on Sundays and Holydays. The blessing on Candlemas Day serves to remind us that it is one of the sacramental uses of which is to excite in us pious dispositions and draw us closer to God.

The law of human friendship requires that you say and do nothing which would give unnecessary pain to a friend.—Cardinal Gibbons.



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