

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

Rev. F. P. Hickey, O. S. B.
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

THE EASTER COMMUNION

"If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever."—John vi. 52.

The miracle of the Gospel, my dear brethren, brings before us the subject of our thoughts to-day. We have studied the Sacrament of Penance; and contrition, confession, absolution, and preparation for the crowning work of all—a Holy Communion.

A Holy Communion, prepared for by a good Confession, is the one thing necessary at Easter-time. Omit that Communion, and all the works of Lent, fasting, alms, penance, prayers, will not do instead.

The Gospel, then, catches our attention this Sunday, and reminds us all that there is a far greater miracle of mercy awaiting our souls this Easter-time. Our Blessed Lord worked this miracle of feeding the five thousand men with the five barley loaves to prepare their hearts to believe those words of His, so soon to be uttered: "I am the Bread of Life. . . If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever." And yet at that they murmured and left Him, and walked no more with Him.

This occurs again, year after year, in almost every congregation. People, who are very angry if the name of Catholic is denied them, who pay to their Church, send their children to the Church—yes, who come themselves, but for the most part only irregularly—who do all this, draw back and will not come to their Easter Communion. They may think they have reasons or excuses, but they have not one which will not wither away before the eye of the Judge—the same Jesus Whom they are now despising in neglecting their Easter Communion.

Can it be that we have to be commended to receive Holy Communion—the greatest honor and privilege that God could give us? "We are so unworthy," is a common excuse. True, but can anyone become less unworthy by disobediently staying away? Come humbly saying, "Lord, I am not worthy," but yet, while awaiting that, let your faith and hope exclaim, "But only say the word." And that blessed word has been said when we went to Confession: "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

Why were the five loaves multiplied? Out of compassion to feed them, lest, being hungry, they should faint in the wilderness. So we, too, are offered by the same gracious Lord the food of our souls. The eyes are not yet. We have to battle on through the wilderness of life, striving our best for heaven; therefore we need food and strength. And here, prepared for us, in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, to feed and nourish our souls.

With a plying prayer for those who are intending to neglect their Easter Communion, or who need a commandment to make them do so, let us turn our attention to our own selves, and see how we can best and most worthily fulfill the Paschal precept. Thank God so many go frequently, monthly, to Holy Communion; but the Easter Communion is something special, and has a character of its own.

First, the obedience of it. That stamps upon us the character of true children of the Church. It must be made during the required time. Then, again, the preparation for it has been greater than for other Communions, and as the preparation, so the devotion, the whole-heartedness of it, should be. It has been said, "One Communion is sufficient to make a saint." Accordingly, as we have spent Lent, more prayers, more sorrow, more self-restraint, so will the graces be, that we shall receive at our Communion.

Again, we come at Easter filled with compassion and love to Him Who said, "Do this in commemoration of Me." We are drawing near the anniversary of the night on which our dear Lord instituted the Blessed Sacrament. He was not content even with going to die for us; He did not want to leave us. So His infinite love led Him to institute the Blessed Eucharist, leaving us His own true Body and Blood, under the appearance of bread and wine, to be the food and sustenance of our souls. He was yearning for friends then; He is yearning for friends now. Even amongst those twelve first communicants, one was a traitor! What fear and humility must fill our souls when we remember that! You see, then, that we cannot be too particular about contrition for our sins, careful examination of conscience, a good confession, honest resolution to break with sin. Let there be sincerity—transparent sincerity—in our hearts.

By receiving the Blessed Sacrament in such dispositions and in obedience to the Paschal precept, we are offering to God the greatest homage that poor creatures can pay to their Creator—homage of faith. We take His word, "If any man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever," and our Communion is a supreme act of faith. Homage of hope! Unworthy though we are, we trust in Him, Whose Precious Blood, which we receive, washed away the sins of the world. Homage of love! For it is love compels us to receive Him, to unite ourselves with Him Who is here for love of us. Fill our souls with Thy Divine Presence, be King of our hearts; inflame our will with this one desire, in all things to please and serve Thee, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The purer the heart the greater its capacity for sorrow or joy.

THE LEPERS AT CULION

NON-CATHOLIC CHERISHED BY THE UNSELFISHNESS AND SELF-DENIAL OF THREE SISTERS

In a recent issue of The Open Court we read of a leper colony at Culion, on the island of Palawan in the Philippines. The author, Mr. A. Reese, who visited the colony (which lies near Tay Tay) describes his visit among the lepers in a fascinating manner, and concludes a section of his story with the following phrase: "As we came out, three Catholic Sisters entered the women's ward to do what they could for the patients there."

Much has been written of the labors of religious at Molokai and of the care and comfort given the lepers at this point by servants of God who have devoted their lives to this work. Very little is known, however, of the work being done at Tay Tay in the Philippines.

Mr. Reese describes the traces of the Spanish occupation, the fort, the churches, the belfry, the huts of the inhabitants and the new hospital and the buildings reserved for the medical staff which is in charge of a Dr. Clements, appointed by the American Government. There are 3,400 lepers here. The lepers are brought in to this colony from the various islands of the Philippines, "so fast that it is with great difficulty that they can be accommodated; but all are made comfortable, in fact much more comfortable, in most cases, than they ever would have been at home. Except for homesickness, which cannot, of course, be avoided, they are quite happy, or as happy as any hopelessly sick people can be away from home and friends."

"Most of the Christian lepers are Catholics, though there is a small Protestant church in the colony, in charge of a leprosy native minister," Mr. Reese writes.

The sacrifice which is being made daily by those, including the three Catholic sisters, who give their lives for the comfort of the unfortunate victims of this loathsome disease, can well be realized from the impressions gained by a chance visitor. Mr. Reese continues: "A large number of the patients who are in the incipient stages showed, to the ordinary observer, no effects of the disease. There were others who at first glance seemed perfectly normal, but on closer scrutiny revealed the absence of one or more toes or fingers. Others had horribly swollen ears; some had no nose left and were distressing objects; but it was not until we visited the various wards of the hospital that we saw leprosy in all of its horrors. Here were dozens of cases so far advanced that they were no longer able to walk; they were lying on their cots waiting for death to come to their release. Some were so emaciated as to look almost like animated skeletons. Others, except for and sometimes in spite of their bandages, looked like horrid, partially decomposed cadavers. It was a sight to make one shudder and devoutly hope that a cure for this awful disease may soon be discovered. These extreme cases are cared for carefully, and their last hours are made as comfortable as possible."

"Shortly before leaving the colony we were led to a small concrete structure (near the furnace where all combustible waste is burned), and as the door was opened we saw before us on a concrete slab four bodies so wasted and shrivelled that they seemed scarcely human. These were those who had at last been cured in the only way that this dread disease admits of cure. About forty per cent are released by death, and those we saw were the last crop of the here merciful, not 'dread reaper.'"

"At the back of the colony we met four lepers in incipient stages, carrying a long box on their shoulders. Just as they came abreast of us they set it down, to rest themselves, and we saw that in the box was another 'cured' leper. He was being carried to the cemetery, not only 'unhonored and unsung,' but also unwept; not a single friend nor relative followed his wasted body to its final resting place. After this pitiful spectacle, added to the horrors of the hospital wards, we were not sorry to turn our steps back toward the boat. As we passed through the fence at the dead line, going away from the colony, we were compelled to wade through a shallow box of water containing a small percentage of carbolic acid which disinfected the soles of our shoes, the only things about us that had come in actual contact with the leper colony. In this way all visitors when they leave the colony, are compelled, not to shake its dust from their feet, but to wash its germs from their soles."

"As for antidote for dissatisfaction with one's lot in life, or as an object lesson for the pessimists who claim there is no usefulness in the world, or as an illustration of the value of the medical missionary, this little island, lying somewhere east of Suez, between the Sulu and the China Seas, is not easily surpassed."

We may be permitted to add that the self denial and fortitude of the poor frail sisters, who, renouncing all the goods of the world, devote their lives purely for the love of God, to the care of such unfortunate, deserve special commendation. Humanly speaking, the mission is a frightful and a repulsive one; yet faith and charity overcome human weakness and make martyrs and missionaries of the weak and frail, where the strong and self-confident flee in horror.—C. B. of C. V.

AN EX-CATHOLIC

It is only too true that, as a general rule, the Catholic who gives up Catholicity eventually gives up Christianity. For one who has been born and reared in the true Faith there is no middle course; it is either full belief in the divinely revealed religion of Jesus Christ or a gradual descent into credulous agnosticism. And we know from sad examples in history that the apostate from Catholicity often proves himself the bitterest of all the enemies of the Church.

England is supposedly a Christian country. A large part of the population still retains at least a vestige of belief in the Divine Redeemer and the religious truths He preached to the world. Protestantism, relying upon private interpretation of the Bible as its one and only rule of faith, has, nevertheless, encouraged its adherents to profess and practise certain, though not all of the basic truths of Christianity. And in this qualified and incomplete acceptance of a part of revealed religion, it has found the stability which has made it possible for the English established church to subsist. But the cancer of disruption has been eating away at its vital parts. In all charity, we are obliged to say that the seeds of dissolution have been hidden away within it and are all the time forcing upwards to the surface. The weeds of infidelity and agnosticism are even now lifting their repulsive heads. And only too many in England are infected with their poison. When a Protestant churchman, who is also identified with Cambridge University, openly voices the sentiment that: "It does not really matter what our Lord said with regard to marriage except that one is naturally influenced by what so great a soul thought and said. But it has no earthly influence on us. We had better put it on one side and start afresh on what we think to be good for our fellow men and women," it is no longer a question of interpreting the Bible for the Bible itself has lost all meaning.

Principles lead us to logical conclusions whether we will have it or no. If there be no absolute authority, to define and determine what must be believed, there can be no lasting and immutable aggregate of doctrines. And no more fundamental or essential ideas regarding life and forever shifting and uncertain.

This is what is so deplorably exemplified in England today. Marriage is being degraded into a mere temporary bargain. Its indisolubility is ridiculed. Divorce is no longer even a luxury. For to all, even to those miserably poor, the severing of the marriage tie is being made an easy formality. It is proposed to enact a law which will make it possible, without delay or inconvenience, for those who have been married, but who have been separated from their respective life-partners, to marry again. Nothing more is required than they apply to a Magistrate and pay a nominal fee. And this in what was once Christian England.

But the saddest feature of it is that the principle advocate of this measure is a former Catholic. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, well known, and greatly admired for his Sherlock Holmes stories, is the sponsor for England's degrading of marriage. Conan Doyle, who was once a Catholic, now advocates a pagan concubinage to take the place of the sacred marriage relationship between Christian men and women.

Poor Conan Doyle! The world may say he is enlightened, but it is not light, but darkness that shrouds his mind and heart. Others may admire him; we pity him.—The Tablet

GIVING ALMS TO GOD

One of the lessons beautifully brought out by the feast of Candlemas is touched upon in Holy Scripture, where we read that Our Lady, after taking up her First-born to Jerusalem, according to the Law, made an offering of two doves in the Temple. It was the offering of the poor, but not for that reason despised by the priests or unworthy in the sight of God. It is probably in memory of the fact that the Catholic custom has obtained up to this day of making an offering of candles for the altar. There is nothing more beautiful or touching in one's life than to have the conviction that Almighty God, made poor for our sakes, deigns to accept from our hands gifts which in their last analysis come from the Giver of all good things.

It is a common joke on the lips of Catholics that the Catholic Church, more than any other religious body, asks sacrifices from its own. Flip-pant people often remark that collections are taken up more frequently in Catholic churches than in any other churches of the world. That collections are frequently taken up in our churches cannot be a bone of contention to any but half-baked Catholics. The real genuine Catholic never balks at a collection, because he knows that he is giving to God a part of those things which the Creator, out of sheer goodness, has loaned him. It is the worldly-minded Catholic, who probably spends each week on theatres, cigars, and drink twice as much as he ever puts into the collection plate, who finds fault with the Church for holding out her hands to supply not only the works of religion, but also to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. The whole-hearted Catholic, like Our Lady, must experience a pang of

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regret when he finds himself constrained to give the offering of the poor to his church. But just as Our Lady gave all she could spare to fulfill the injunctions of the law, and gave it with a glad heart, so the real Catholic sets aside for the Church and her needs all he can spare. He realizes that generosity on his part will call down not only blessings from heaven, but will bring also an increase of success and well being in a temporal way.

It is the poor who have made possible the spread of our holy religion in this country. They understand better than the rich that Christ is the one Poor Man of the world's history. They are nobles of Him because of His poverty. Their poverty brings them into close touch with Him. And even if they have but a crust to break with Him, they break it gladly, since they know that His needs in His Church are greater than theirs could ever be. They sympathize with Christ, feel with Him and for Him, and that puts a special tenderness into their gifts. On the other hand, the millionaire Catholics are to a certain extent ashamed of Christ. They seldom give in proportion to their riches as do the poor. And it is probably for this reason that the faith amongst these worldly-minded Catholics is gradually evaporating, like water out of salt.—Rosary Magazine.

THEN AND NOW

Before the coming of Christ, the outlook for domestic, national, and universal peace was fainter than now. Amid the distraction and disorder of that day, the Star of Bethlehem, directing attention to Him from Whom alone true peace can come, shone brightly, but was heeded by few. The terms of peace in that day were "glorify God" and "be men of good will." These conditions to-day would form the basis of an early and enduring peace, if they were only accepted by the nations. There is surely a lesson which the Almighty would have mankind learn through this War, but people seemingly will not learn it—that God has greater interests in this world than we have, that we, as His creatures, must place His interests foremost.

He, Who came to bring peace into the world, even now has a representative who could hasten the end of the War if the kings of earth at present, like the Magi of old, came to Him for counsel. Instead, the rulers of nations, like Herod of yore, would destroy his influence and silence his voice. Had the nations not turned against Him in the past, they would still be united in one grand peaceable fraternity, and no king or emperor would have dared to embroil the world in such a strife as we are now witnessing. To-day the representative of the Prince of Peace has many devout followers in every country engaged in this brutal War, and they would cheerfully submit to him the grievances of their country in the hope of a most just decision for all concerned, but the "Council of Kings" has agreed not to do this.

The destruction of Jerusalem was a figure of the destruction of the world; on the occasion of the former the Prince of Peace spoke these words: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . how often would I have gathered together thy children as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wing, and thou wouldst not. Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate." (Matt. xxiii.)

Of old, the nations were slow to accept the Prince of Peace; for three hundred years His emissaries were imprisoned, tortured, and put to death; His followers dared not advocate His terms nor His policies. But finally the nations saw their error and submitted, and a peace dawned, the like of which had never reigned in this world. We have no doubt that the nations will ultimately "follow the Star," and be led to the "Prince of Peace," but let us hope and pray that they may soon raise their eyes heavenward that they may see the Star.—Our Sunday Visitor.

THE EYE

Wordsworth has brought many a truth into life both for the eye and for the understanding, which previously had slumbered, indistinctly for all men. For instance, as respects the eye, who does not acknowledge instantaneously the strength of reality in that saying upon a cataract seen from a station two miles off, that it was "frozen by distance?" In all Nature there is not an object so essentially at war with the stiffening of frost as the headlong and desperate life of a cataract; and yet notoriously the effect of distance is to look up this frenzy of motion into the most petrific column of stillness. This effect is perceived at once when pointed out; but how few are the eyes that ever would have perceived it for themselves!—De Quincey.

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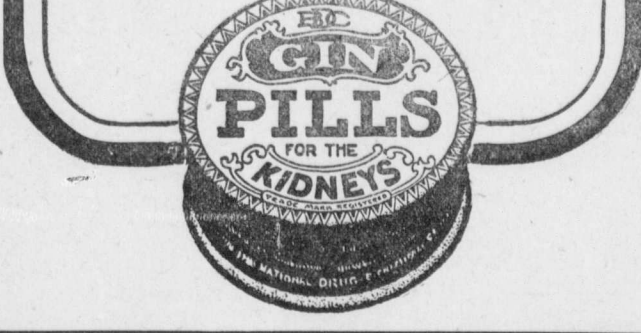
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