

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. F. P. HICKEY, O. S. B.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

"And this is the confidence which we have towards Him: that whatsoever we shall ask according to His will, He heareth us." (1 John v. 14)

We must often feel, my dear brethren, an utter want of reliance on ourselves, taught us by so many shortcomings and failures in the past. And we look round for a stay, a support to which our souls might cling, and find safety and security. Such a support we shall find in confidence in God, which will brighten our daily lives, and bid hope spring up within us, and assure us that in doing our best we are pleasing God, and securing eternal life for our souls.

It is no mere fancy, but a reality, that we rightly can have this confidence in God, and that the more we trust in Him the more we please Him. And the foundation of this confidence is the knowledge we have of the goodness and the love of God. The proof of this goodness and love is that He sent His Son into this world to redeem us. "God, Who is rich in mercy, for His exceeding charity whereby He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by whose grace you are saved." (Eph. ii. 4, 5). "God sent His Son . . . that He might redeem them who were under the law; that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. iv. 4, 5).

We have likewise, both in the Old and New Testament, repeated assurances of God's goodness. He assures us and promises us that He is ready to hear to us, to succour us, to forgive us, and not to abandon one who hopes in Him. David in his Psalm (xc. 14-16) makes God say: "Because He hoped in Me, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he hath known My Name. He shall cry to Me, and I will hear him. I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him and I will glorify him. I will fill him with length of days, and I will show him My salvation." And the wise man bids us "Believe God, and He will recover thee and direct thy way. Trust in Him, . . . believe Him, and your reward shall not be made void . . . hope in Him, and mercy shall come to you for your delight . . . Love Him, and your hearts shall be enlightened." (Ecclesi. ii. 6-10). Our Blessed Lord Himself sums up all the promises and assurances with His own blessed words: "Therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you." (Mark xi. 24).

An inner voice tells us the same as the Scriptures. The inner voice of past experience, blessing God for so many favours, bids us have most loving confidence in Him for the time to come. What marvels and favours we have received from His hands! What countless graces, what gentleness, patience, readiness to forgive have we met with from our dear Lord! From past experience of His love and goodness we may truly say, "And this is the confidence which we have towards Him: that whatsoever we shall ask according to His will, He heareth us."

This confidence in God, then, strengthening our prayer, makes of it a supreme power. Filled with this trust in Him, it is a joy and a glory to pray. God's mercy far exceeds what even the Saints prayed for and longed for; for God wishes to give more than man cares to accept. Let us be ashamed of our past coldness and sloth. What a dignity it is that God grants us to be allowed to invoke Him in prayer—devout prayer strengthened by confidence in His love—prayer which is received by the Holy Angel and offered up to God. And we need this power, great as it is, and we must use it assiduously.

Why? Because we are poor and weak and prone to sin. Our need bids us turn to pray. And we have enemies too! The remembrance and fear of the strength, number, ceaseless vigilance, and cruelty of those enemies of our soul urge us to seek safety in the strength of prayer. We have enemies to fear, but the good God to trust in. Our prayers hitherto have not been the prayers that these enemies would fear, or that would satisfy Almighty God. For prayer, to be a real efficacious power, must be fervent, reverent, and constant. Then it will not only defend us from the enemy, but will also rouse our souls to earnestness and devotion.

For this—for a daily increase in zeal and piety—let us learn how to address our prayers to God. First with fervour, but He is our loving Father. It is not in much praying that we are heard, but in the fervour of our hearts. And should not confidence arouse this fervour in us?

And reverently we must pray—that is, from a heart which has already put away sin and attachment to it. "And whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him; because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight." (1 John iii. 24). How many past prayers of ours have been a failure for want of this reverence? Sinfulness was only hiding, and not really banished from our hearts, and we wondered, and were ended that God's grace would not come in.

Lastly, prayer to be a real power must be constant. Prayer is the spiritual breath of our souls. It is as necessary and must be as constant as the work of our lungs. We under-

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stand and see to our health; we are very keen about the breath of life; we must be as keen about the breathing, the strong, deep, regular breathing of our souls.

Alas! we do not pray thus with the fervour, reverence, constancy that we should. We pray mostly from custom, devout if we are in the humour, with little or no amendment or resolution to amend. God's goodness is waiting, ready to put His confidence in our hearts, but it must be joined to fervent, reverent, constant prayer to be the power that it should be with our Heavenly Father.

WHY CATHOLICS HONOR MARY

With the coming of May, Mary's month, the heart of the entire Catholic world will turn with loving reverence towards the Mother of God, and once again we shall be struck by the evidence of the Divinity of Christ's Church in the spectacle of that unity in diversity which is so striking a characteristic of Catholicism. Different in race, color, civilization and customs, rent by divisions that are threatening the very existence of humanity, alienated by dissensions that defy the highest ingenuity of the mind of man to bridge, every portion of the known world is gathering about the shrines of the Blessed Virgin, to say the same prayers, to breathe the same aspirations, to implore the same protection, to render the same homage. Even in spite of itself the mind of man, if it be not blinded by impenetrable prejudice, finds itself forced by the evidence of fact to cry out, "The finger of God is here." Such an effect transcends human agencies, it postulates a Divine cause. Its origin is to be traced to Christ.

Everywhere the children of Mary, as they kneel before the shrine of the Blessed Virgin, will find her, as it should be with a mother, holding out to them her Child. Approach to Christ, and there will not be a Catholic, not the simplest boy or girl, who will not realize that if he honors Mary it is because Mary is the Mother of God. A secondary reason for her hyperdulia, that worship, wholly different in kind from the *latría*, which is paid to God alone, but at the same time far in excess of the *dulia* given to the Saints, is the mandate of the Supreme Lawgiver to honor the Creator in all His creatures. For it would be a strange inconsistency were we to praise God in His tumbling cataclysms and His rushing waters and refuse to praise Him in the fairest work of His hands, excepting only the humanity of Christ. Nevertheless, the fundamental, principal, all-sufficient and compelling motive for doing homage to the Lily of Israel, is the fact that she is the Mother of Christ.

Catholics are convinced, not merely by laws of logic but by the impulse of their own hearts, that they cannot possibly please Christ the Son by dishonoring Mary His Mother. They leave to heresy the impossible task of reconciling this irreconcilable contradiction, being conscious meanwhile that one of the most powerful factors for the preserving of belief in the Divinity of Christ has been precisely the belief that they should honor Mary as the Mother of God. It is an appalling fact of history that those who have begun by rejecting the Blessed Mother have ended by rejecting the Divine Son. The belief in the Divinity of Christ outside the Cath-

olic Church is exceedingly tenuous, it is growing weaker day by day. The conviction is almost inevitable that this is a judgment of God, as if Christ said, "If you will not have My Mother, you shall not have Me." To try to tear the Christ-Child from the arms of His Mother, or to drag her from the foot of the Cross is to attempt the impossible. Those who have endeavored to do so have utterly failed. The practice of refusing honor to the Madonna is one of the surest indications of Protestantism, the practice of paying her honor is one of the clear proofs of Catholic truth.—America.

SOCIALISM OF MADMEN

While there has been incessant chattering about Bolshevism, there has been little plain talk. As a consequence we have wide confusion concerning it and private interpretation. Individuals are identifying Bolshevism with personal ideals of social reform. So, while we may denounce the movement generously, it is constantly augmenting its forces in this country. Its condemnation by the American press is given the worst possible interpretation. As the organs of capitalism, papers are supposed to be suppressing and misrepresenting the facts concerning the operation of the Soviet government in Russia. Because our papers have none too good a reputation for serving public, in preference to private interests, this story finds acceptance. Some accordingly are picturing Bolshevism as a wonderful, new and secret program for restoring the social balance.

There is no secrecy about Bolshevism, save such as it chooses to cast upon itself to hide its identity. Bolshevism is Socialism, working out logically to anarchy. The Bolshevists are the radicals. There are no parlor Socialists among them. The doctrines of Bolshevism have been taught for half a century, but heretofore they have been dishonestly labeled revolutionary Socialism. Bolshevism passes all the extremes of reason, right and justice, to an extent that capitalism and autocracy in their most grasping moments never dared. That is the plain fact: no capitalist press need or can change.

The Bolshevists are a minority. That they have the unchecked upland is in itself a condition incompatible with the American theory of government. There is no harmonizing the Red government of Russia with any possible modification of the American political dogma. One is the antithesis of the other. If this fact were emphasized, which will not be done so long as Herrons are sent to represent America in conference with Russia, Bolshevism will not find much sympathy with us. Frankly, the less stir we make concerning it, the better. We need not advertise it; its own proponents are zealous in this. We can serve our own cost best, however, by speaking plainly of it when we must. Bolshevism is Socialism come into its own.—Chicago New World.

OUR LADY'S BARDS

If it is true, as theologians tell us, that the angels have a language all their own, then perhaps some day when they have exhausted their praises of Our Lady they will turn to the English language, which in the last few decades of years has tried its best, especially by its Marian poems, to live down the structures of Cardinal Newman, who described it as essentially a Protestant tongue. Unfortunately, this is true to a great extent today, for the literature which finds its way into our own text-books is almost exclusively the product of non-Catholic writers. But we like to hug the idea that the keenest kind of discrimination has not been shown in the selection of works which are supposed to be representative of the best things in spiritual literature. For did not Milton, Pope and Oscar Wilde—to take but three—hymn songs to Our Lady which will live as long as the English language is spoken?

And yet these poets have missed what songsters of less exalted gifts have invariably caught—that understanding, sympathetic touch without which even the best poetry is a soulless thing. Poetry comes from the heart. It discovers its only home there. Bathed in the white light of great thought, it is yet blood-red with palpitating feeling. A poet who does not move us sings in vain. He is like the thraged bird whose song, however clear and limpid, seems artificial and strained, and not free with the joyousness of full liberty.

And this is the characteristic note of all those outside the Church who sing of Our Lady. They are afraid to let themselves go. They are willing to hail Our Lady as the most perfect woman, "our poor nature's solitary boast." But Mary was more than that, just as her Son, Jesus Christ, was more than the most perfect man. Mary needs not to be dressed out, even by the poet, in a garb which was not hers. She is wonderful and beautiful enough for what she is, without the adventitious embellishments of the poet.

And here is where the Catholic poet excels. He knows Mary for what she is. That is enough for him, for no higher place, no greater prerogatives, could have been bestowed upon any creature. Most mortals, even poets, can not look upon the unspeakable glory of God. But they can look upon Our Lady and find her one of ourselves—a

window, so to say, through which the awful brightness of God's glory is reflected to a world whose eyes are hidden by the very conditions of its nature. Men can rise to a partial understanding of God's glory by a study of Our Lady—the handmaid of the Lord," as she humbly calls herself.

No wonder, then, that all Catholic poets essay with more or less success to sing of Our Lady. The great geniuses attempt to speak of God in Catholic poets love Mary, whilst those outside the Church only admire her. And this makes all the difference in the world. To sing worthily of Mary one must love her—must love her intensely, as Jesus loved her. He alone could have written an adequate poem about her, because He alone knew her for what she was, and, withal, loved her as she deserved to be loved. But His spirit hovered over her as she sang the "Magnificat," the sweetest poem in prose that ever came from human lips.

John Boyle O'Reilly puts into matchless verse the true meaning to a Catholic of the name Mary:

Dear honored name, beloved of human ties,
But loved and honored first that One was given
In living proof, to erring mortal eyes,
That our poor flesh is near akin to heaven.

Sweet word of dual meaning: one of grace,
And born of our kind Advocate above;
And one, by mercy linked to that of reason,
That blessed my childhood with its mother-love.

And taught me first the simple prayer: "To thee,
Poor banished sons of Eve, we send our cries,"
Through mist of years, these words recall to me
A childish face upturned to loving eyes.

And yet, to some the name of Mary bears
No special meaning and no gracious power;
In that dear word they look for hidden smiles
As wasps find poison in the sweetest flower.

But faithful hearts can see, o'er doubts and fears,
The Virgin-link that binds the Lord to earth;
Which, to the upturned, trusting face, appears
Greater than angel, though of human birth.

The sweet-faced morn reflects, on cheerless night,
The rays of hidden sun that rise tomorrow;
So, unseen, God still lets His promised light
Through holy Mary, shine upon our sorrow.

Now, the prerogative which appeals most mightily to us is Our Lady's purity. Of course we know that, being called to be the Mother of the Son of God, it was fitting that she should never be for so much as one moment under the dominion of the Evil One. That she should have been lifted up high over the murky stream of humanity by virtue of the merits of Christ is but one of the great graces which she, as the Mother of God, received. Human nature is at its best in Mary. She shows us what we might have aspired to if sin, with its consequent disorganization of the passions, had not entered into the world:

"Pure as the snow," we say. Ah, never flake
Fell through the air
One tenth as fair
As Mary's soul was made for Christ's dear sake.

Virgin immaculate,
The whitest whiteness of the Alpine snows,
Beside thy stainless spirit dusky grows.

"Pure as the stars." Ah, never lovely night
Wore in its diadem
So pure a gem
As that which fills the eyes with its light.

Virgin immaculate:
The peerless splendor of thy soul by far
Outshines the glow of heaven's serene-est star.

Our Lady's purity, as all her other virtues, would have been a cold, forbidding, stoical, had her life not been dominated by a sublime humility by which she considered herself, despite all the wonderful things God had done for her, merely as His humble handmaid. She herself confessed that "the Lord hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." From Him came all the virtues which grew in her soul in the first instance. Therefore, she is grateful to Him in proportion as she contemplates herself. If the nations call her blessed, it is solely because the Lord hath poured out His graces upon her. Truly does our own

American poet, Joyce Kilmer, extol her humility in this virile poem:

"Hail, Mary, full of grace," the Angel saith.

Our Lady bows her head and is ashamed;
She has a Bridegroom who may not be named.

Her mortal flesh bears Him who conquers death.
Now in the dust her spirit groveleth;
Too bright a sun before her eyes has flamed,
Too fair a heralded joy too high proclaimed,
And human lips have trembled in God's breath.

O Mother-Maid, thou art ashamed to cover
With thy white self, whereon no stain can be,
Thy God, Who came from Heaven to be thy Lover,
Thy God Who came from Heaven to dwell in thee.
About thy head celestial legions hover,
Chanting the praise of thy humility.

During this May month we gather flowers to lay at Mary's shrine, for we believe that the sweetest buds that burst into blossom are all too poor a gift to present to her as a token of our love. But we gather, too, the flowers that have grown in the human heart for her who is the Mystic Rose, the one white, unsullied Lily that has saved its perfume in the murky valley of this world. —Thomas M. Schwertner, O. P., in *Rosary Magazine*.

THE RESTLESS WORLD

The Peace Conference has now been sitting many weeks and peace is as far away as ever—an ideal to be striven for, rather than an objective fact attained. Indeed, unless appearances are altogether deceitful, the olive branches that were to have been sent from Paris to the exhausted nations are withering away for lack of suitable messengers. The doves that were to have borne them abroad have fallen upon one another, to the scandal of the world.

The Peace Conference convoked to pour oil and wine into the wounds of the mangled world, is itself at war, and men are asking sorry heads over the unseemly squabble, precipitated, it would appear, by the very lust for power and territory that motivated the Great War. This is a sad and despicable sight, worthy, perhaps, of pagans, but altogether out of keeping with Christian character.

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acter. Yet, though thoughtful men may be disgusted over the fracas, they will hardly be surprised at it.

The Conference met to decide the most momentous problems in the history of the world. Territory and trade and passions were so inextricably commingled that impartial folk wondered how the difficulties could be encompassed by the mere power of man. They had hoped the aid of God would be invoked that the world might be set once again in the ways of peace. But the Conference was of a different mind. It thought itself sufficient unto itself. If exception be made for the accident by which the President of France dropped the word, God, in his open-

ing speech, the name of God has not been mentioned once at any of the sessions. His power has not been invoked; His assistance has not been asked, and He has delivered the Conference into the hands of its council. The result is confusion worse confounded, a scandal to the Christian world, a joke to the pagan world. The end of the disgraceful squabble no man can tell, for passion is fitful, but at least Christian peoples can learn this lesson from it: their welfare is not safe in the keeping of men who doubt God, the source of light and peace.—America.

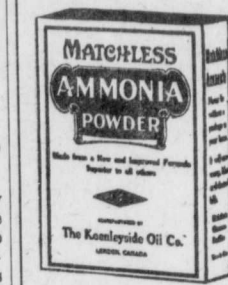
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