

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

OUR DUTY TOWARD THE CHURCH

"At that time, when Jesus entered into the boat, His disciples followed Him; and behold, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was in danger with waves; but He was asleep." (Matt. viii. 23.)

There are many pictures of the Church in the Gospels, and there is no doubt that the incident related today is symbolical of the Church and her trials. Certainly the comparison is exact, for as the ship was tossed about by the waves, so the Church is struck by the waves of persecution and unbelief; as the presence of Christ in the boat was the power that saved it from destruction, so His ever invisible presence with the Church the power that sustains her and will sustain her for all ages. Again, we may remark that the apostles exhausted their human efforts in attempting to save the boat, and so in the Church there must be human effort, with which is combined the grace and infinite power of Christ. Though the Church is divine, she is made up on earth of humans, and they must use their natural powers, as well as depend upon God for supernatural help. In fact, since we are human agents, we reasonably can not expect God's intervention and help unless we do a human's share.

It is principally of this work of ours, as human free beings, that we wish to speak in reference to the Gospel of this Sunday. Each one of us forms an integral part of the Church. In her eyes, no soul is more deserving of salvation than another. All are equal in her sight, and she will do for one what she will do for another. In performing her principal work—the salvation of souls. As a good mother loves equally well each one of her children, so does the Church cherish an equal love for each human being within her fold. Let no one think that in the eyes of the Church he is slighted, or treated less considerately than any other member. Even the erring ones are as dear to her, as regards their salvation, as the righteous. Does she not day after day sweetly administer even to the sinner the sacrament that cleanses, and gently and lovingly embrace him as if he had never erred from the path? Her charity is all-embracing, her love for her children absolutely impartial.

What should man do for her in return? Reason alone easily makes his duty known to him, his manhood must feel it, his dignity as a Catholic demand it. He must do all in his power to promote the welfare of his Church, to extend her kingdom, to live up to her commandments—not to mention her commandments and at the cost of everything, even life if necessary. So important is it that he should do these things that if he fail, not she but he will be shipwrecked spiritually. But he should not need a threat to urge him or move him to the fulfillment of these duties, but, as we have already said, reason, love, manliness, call him to it.

He must use every power he has and exert all his influence to have the Church spread among more people. As he belongs to her, he knows, better than anyone else, her aim and her fostering care and the haven of eternal safety to which she is bringing her children. Does he not wish to see more and more brought under her motherly care, so as to become recipients of her heavenly graces and blessings? Are there not ever before his eyes glaring examples of brethren wandering far away from God in the vast plains of uncertainty? What may he do for them by telling them of the sweetness and security of a true, real faith? He speaks from experience; his own heart opens itself to them. They will listen to him. He is a unit, so to speak, of a whole, but a unit that can not be neglected. Others can become like him. Will he not urge them to investigate impartially? If he does his part, he may be sure that God will do the rest.

He also must feel that the welfare of the Church, to some extent, depends upon his efforts. His share will add to that of the other members, and all together will promote her interests and do the part for her welfare, that God expects from her members. His own spiritual welfare depends upon that of the Church. Where there have been abuses in the Church and almost wholesale defection from her law, individuals suffered, not the Church herself. Where she prospers and her welfare is safe, individuals will likewise prosper and be safeguarded. Under the spell of a Luther, for instance, how many fell and lost the great gift of faith, who otherwise would have remained in the Church had they had her interests at heart, and had they been engaged in promoting her welfare.

When we lament the fall of so many from their faith, we must remember that it was their own fault. They had not the interest of the Church at heart; occasionally, no doubt, they partook of her benefits, but they did nothing to promote her welfare. They were selfish, and through this selfishness especially, which is accompanied by neglect, they failed to listen to their spiritual mother's voice. You who have the Faith today, remember by whom it is nourished and fostered, and as you prize it above

all other blessings, do not fail to manifest an active, continual interest in it. If you neglect it, when danger comes you may fall a victim and be bereft of every true hope.

The precepts of your Church are the suggestions of God. They enable you to keep more easily His great commandments. They are the rules which you, as a member, must obey, in order to belong properly to the Church, as you must obey the laws of your country to be, properly speaking, a good citizen. They are not a burden, but a help. They show to the world, when you obey them, the love you have for your Church; in their observance by you they are an evident manifestation of your manliness, and an open book of the duty you well do.

Your Church is rocked by the waves of prejudice, unbelief, and by her wicked enemies. Do you a mariner's part. Let her not rock, and you vainly sit at ease and see her endangered. Give a helping hand, raise a pleading voice to God, who may seem asleep, but who is close by watching your efforts. Literature of a most poisonous kind is spread broadcast, full of hatred, full of lies, against your spiritual mother, the Church. You spread Catholic literature as an antidote. For a very small sum you can obtain hundreds of pamphlets which you can put into the hands of people, and thus help to destroy the poison injected by the illogical, imaginary, impure papers, books, and pamphlets coming from the devil's press.

On the railroad, in the office, at home, wherever you hear your religion attacked, consider it an unjust attack upon yourself, as it really is, and raise a protesting voice. See how quickly, if you do, the cowards will crouch and the serpent retire to his hole.

You are men and women enough, and it makes you pre-eminently men and women, to belong to Christ's Church. Will you not further enhance your dignity by spreading her doctrines, promoting her welfare, defending and protecting her? You will surely. You would lose your integrity without such a basis, no solid achievement in the direction of unity can be had. It should, naturally, be possible to take it for granted that Christians would have followed their Master, who "knew what was in a man," they will also seek to know the things which are agitating the minds of their brethren. And particularly is this necessary in these days when through unfortunate events in past centuries for which we are but slightly, if at all responsible, we have inherited prejudices which we would fain cast aside.

ANGLICANS AND UNITY

The first requisite for peace and friendship is a desire on the part of men to understand each other, for without such a basis, no solid achievement in the direction of unity can be had. It should, naturally, be possible to take it for granted that Christians would have followed their Master, who "knew what was in a man," they will also seek to know the things which are agitating the minds of their brethren. And particularly is this necessary in these days when through unfortunate events in past centuries for which we are but slightly, if at all responsible, we have inherited prejudices which we would fain cast aside.

The vituperations of the pamphleteers of a century ago, as well as the coarse lampoons of earlier centuries are felt to be out of place in this era, and although the political world has just emerged from the most colossal war in history, men feel that an eirenic method is certainly the only proper one in religious matters and are beginning to feel that the "peace on earth" which the angels came to announce, but which seems as yet so strangely delayed, is a most desirable condition.

Unity among the believers in Christ is recognized as a sine qua non to peace in Church or State, and the longing for it is very evident. To a Catholic the faith of unity is fundamental, and he ardently longs to see all those "other sheep" enclosed in the "one fold," accepting in full the loving care of the "one Shepherd," hence every effort which is made to clear the ground for such a return should be welcomed by him, studied and analyzed in order that he may gain from it the point of view of his separate friends, and thus meet them, if possible, at least halfway in their endeavors. It is therefore with sincere and unfeigned joy that we welcome a recent editorial in the Living Church which addresses itself to the task of outlining what "the inner genius of Anglicanism really is."

To essay such an undertaking was not altogether easy, for Anglicanism is not readily articulable as a whole, and when one professes to speak for it, his voice is too frequently drowned by a multitude of his fellow-Anglicans who disclaim his right to speak for them, or when he has spoken, refuse to accept his dictum as representing their own conception of their common religion. But bearing in mind these limitations we gladly welcome the contribution which the Living Church has to make, for it has the best right to speak of any who profess to be able to do so. It starts out with the statement that

"In these days when the desire of all men for unity seems of a peculiarly poignant and sharp character, when in the welter of divided Christendom many thousands bewail our divisions and clamor for healing the breaches in the Body of Christ and recalling his separated members, it is well to see in what character our Mother Church, the Anglican branch

of the Catholic Church, appears in this stress and agony."

And the editor quotes approvingly some words of the late Father Tyrrell whose unhappy career does not make him a reliable spokesman for any Christian body, to the effect that "it is impossible not to think and hope that Providence may have destined the Church of England to bridge over the hitherto impassable gulf that sunders Protestantism from Catholic Christianity." Could it do so, its service would indeed be invaluable, but can it do so? To do such a thing one must be able not only to have, as the editor avers Anglicanism has, a "sympathetic reaction" to "the immobile serenity and colossal cogency of Rome's claims on the one side, and the strenuous appeal and one-sided persuasiveness of Protestant liberalism on the other," but it must also have a very positive and definite program of action; something which is superior to that which can be offered on either side; something which stands every test and which can prove itself under stress.

In the excerpts we have quoted we note the claim of Anglicanism to be a "branch of the Catholic Church," which claim, if it means anything at all, means that it claims to be in the Church of our Lord's foundation, and to have received a Divine commission from Him for its life and works. To be in any wise a part, a "branch," if this term is preferable, of the Catholic Church any Christian body must be conscious of its oneness with the parent stem and must be able to make good the claim we have asserted above. Does Anglicanism do this? We shall let the Living Church speak for itself. We quote the passage in extenso, lest we be accused of garbling the sense.

"Serene immobility belongs only to the Church which has found and attained its ideals, and that ideal is performance limited and bounded by the very fact that, in this day of a divided and disunited Christendom, such attainment can be regarded as having been made. The answer of the Anglican Church is a humbler answer; she strives to attain, she prays that those who have such guidance of the Holy Spirit, she does not claim that she can desecrate in every detail the outline of the United Church of Christ. But for us, living here and now, when men agonize as never before to fulfil our Lord's prayer 'that all may be one,' we may look with high courage and deep confidence to that branch of the Church to which we belong. She claims to no perfection of plan, while millions of Christians are divided. She presents no panacea while, in the very circumstances of the anomaly of a divided Christendom, no one method can be discerned to bring about unity. She may not forfeit her Catholic heritage and the contact it establishes, by a wrongly directed sympathy of her heart, for Protestantism. She may not surrender her witness to non-Papal Catholicism, by withholding sympathy, understanding, and fellowship from our Protestant brethren. If the state of Christianity is anomalous, so is her position, for she feels, labors, and yearns for all. If the ideal is yet to be realized, she shows us the way: the Church which strives and labors to bring into being something greater than she has realized in herself; the Church which has not yet attained but presses forward; the Church which is not yet a complete circle in doctrine, discipline, design, and development, but 'an arc of a wider circle'—suggesting, inspiring, evoking passionate loyalty, and enthusiasm, suffering and causing pain, yet promising only that in her God's will may be done, to the realization of our Blessed Lord's Prayer 'that all may be one.'"

On this then, rests Anglicanism's claim to be the unifier, the healer of the breach, the means of fulfilling our Lord's high-priestly prayer. Let us analyze. We accept the statement that "serene immobility belongs only to the Church which has found and attained its ideals" and also that "that ideal is performance limited." It most assuredly is, for our Blessed Lord Himself limited it, and His Church finds and attains its ideals in Him and the limitations which He set. Nor does the fact of a "divided and disunited Christendom" affect the essential unity of the true Church one whit. "It must needs be that divisions come." Call it "an humble answer," if you will, to confess that "she claims no perfection of plan," but we must needs feel that there is something lacking in the logic which would claim that "a Church which is not yet a complete circle in doctrine" can be a safe guide to present "the faith which was once for all delivered to the Saints" or that "she shows us the way" out of our present unhappy divisions. To say that "the ideal is yet to be realized" is to say that our Lord failed in His foundation of the Church, that unity is not one of the notes whereby we are to distinguish the true Church from counterfeiters of it, but that it is something for which we must strive and agonize until it is brought to pass. In other words it is something most desirable but it is an improvement on Christ's plan, and not an original part of it. This would be amusing were it not on the verge of blasphemy.

It was this fundamental error regarding unity which bore upon me, as I too, was "striving to attain," seeking an answer and following as best I could, the light of the Holy Spirit. And thanks be to God, He gave

me that light to see the falseness and blindness of the position that Anglicanism occupies. The Living Church confesses:

"There is something larger and greater blindly and indistinctly moving in the Anglican Church, so great and so wonderful that it eludes our grasp, slips away from the ready and constant attempt at definition, and yet evokes a mystical and self-abnegatory loyalty, which defies logic and transcends our limited reasonings."

Is not this condition in itself an indictment of its claims to be the real guide of one's soul, the anchor of one's hope, the reliance of one's faith? How can a Church which is "blindly and indistinctly" setting forth even the truth present "to all men . . . a greater and wider Catholicism than that of Rome," even supposing there were such a thing? We are framing no indictment of the Anglican Church or its power to serve, the editor of the Living Church does that. His remarks are so true, they lead so irrefutably to the conclusion that his Church is but a blind leader of the blind, that his words are almost those of an unwilling prophet. We welcome them as a contribution to the cause, for they clear the ground a great deal and dispose more effectually than any words of mine could do, of the Anglican claim either to be the Church or to lead men to it, through an acceptance of its conditions. We Catholics shall continue to pray that those who have such longings as the editor has expressed may be granted the gift of faith, and be enabled to realize where it is alone that all the notes of the Church are found already existing. —Floyd Keeler in America.

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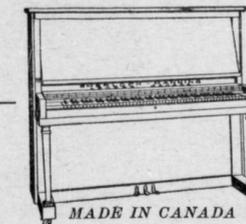
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