

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

STRIVING FOR PERFECTION

"A good tree can not bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit." (Matt. vii. 18)

Christ in the Gospels, frequently compares man's life on earth to a tree that bears fruit, and it is to be noted that man must bring forth some sort of fruit. This follows from the fact that he is a free being, and acting rationally, his works will be good or bad from a moral standpoint. Were man merely possessed of an instinct like the animals, he would not be accountable for his acts. But, considering him as he is, every act, thought and word is some sort of fruit. Christ gives us a means of judging the fruits of our life. If we are good, the fruits borne by us will be good; if evil, then the fruits of our life also will be evil. This is not always apparent to men, for hypocrites and deceivers often perform works apparently of great merit. But Christ says it will be evident some day, for He tells us that we can discover false prophets by the fruits which follow from their hypocritical acts.

This consideration of the fruits we produce in our lives and the subsequent, if not immediate, revelation of their nature, should seriously occupy us. After all, our life on earth is only the beginning of a fuller life which is to come to us. This fuller life will be either one of eternal happiness or of eternal misery. Now, which it will be depends upon the fruit we bear during the days of our mortal existence.

In the more or less ignorant state in which humanity has been left since the fall of Adam and Eve, often we are liable to become blinded to the true nature of the works of our life. There is also the arch-deceiver of mankind, who can change himself into an angel of light and deceive us in our opinion of the fruits of our lives. So it is necessary for us to be certain of the true nature of the fruits we bear. Otherwise we may blindly pass along in life, performing works which we judge to be good, but which in reality are evil. Christ gives us the key to passing the right judgment on our works. He says that if we are virtuous, the fruits of our life will be good; but if we are wicked, then the fruits produced by us will be evil.

But how are we to find out whether we are good or bad? Ordinary means for doing so are at hand. Are we Christians in the full sense of the word? Are we honestly endeavoring to carry out the mandates of Christ? If we can truthfully answer before God that we are using our best efforts to lead a good Christian life, then we can have a moral certainty that we are producing good fruits; greater assurance than this we cannot have in life.

But how do we become a good or a bad tree, in the sense in which Christ speaks? Certainly we are not bad by nature, even though the effects of original injustice remain within us. Neither does God intend good and bad trees to exist together in the world. His will is that all men be saved; and in order to be saved, a man must produce, under the influence of grace, works worthy of eternal life. In other words, God wills all men to be good. The fact is, however, that the wicked continue in the world as well as the good. The reasons for the existence of these two classes are plain enough. The reason why some are wicked is neglect of God's grace and a yielding to passions; the reason why others are good is because they mortify their passions and come, by various means, under the influence of divine grace.

It is well for all of us to ask ourselves what course we are now pursuing. No doubt we shall be inclined to think that we are leading a life of righteousness, or, at least, that we are doing our best to that end. It is human to think thus. But it will help us to form a true opinion of ourselves if we take a retrospective glance and compare our present moral condition with what it was a year or two ago, or even further back. Are we better now than we were then? Have we fewer evil habits, whether great or small, than we had at that time? The one who has really improved, who has conquered some of the habits that existed in his soul, is indeed a good tree and is bearing good fruit. But what must be said of the one who is no better, though no worse, and has eradicated none of his former habits? True, he may be good, but unless a change comes for the better—even though it be only in the smallest degree—he is in great danger of a gradual decay. God wants us to progress toward virtue. Nay, even nature is so formed that if it is not continually subdued, it will be the conqueror.

It is principally due to the absence of a true knowledge of one's moral condition that fall from grace occurs. And this lack of knowledge of our real condition results, generally, from the absence of meditation in our lives. How much we can learn in this respect from the saints! Their life was one of continuous meditation. They never ceased to think on God, and on the dangers besetting them. Even in the midst of occupations of the most absorbing kind, they never allowed the foremost aim of their lives to be forgotten for a moment. There existed in them that intention called habitual,

and by it their every act was sanctified. Their lives were good, they kept them so themselves, aided by God's grace. Even then, however, they were never certain of their eternal salvation. Knowing the weakness of human nature, and the prevalence of dangers everywhere, they realized that they must never cease in their unholiness, and must wage an even more bitter fight against nature. Perhaps we never can reach a state of perfection equal to theirs, but certainly we can be imitators of their endeavors.

How necessary it is for the Christian, even though he feels that he is as good a tree, to continue his progress. It is very easy to fall into a routine; to attend Mass on Sunday simply because it is the law of the Church; to say a few prayers in the morning and at night, because good people generally do it. If a man finds himself in this condition, let him consider it a foreboding of spiritual decay, and stir himself up to a life of fervor. Even the good can not remain virtuous unless nourished with new, good food.

Let us ask ourselves, are we as the good tree as the evil? And if one or the other, which we certainly must be, what are the prospects for the harvest time, when the fruits of our lives will be gathered? If good now, will they be good then? If bad now, shall we allow them to remain so? In either case, it depends upon ourselves.

THE SACRED HEART

AND THE HUMAN HEART

By Albert Reynaud in the Missionary

The best part in man, take it all in all, is his affections. Not what he has known, not even what he has achieved, but what he has loved is the truest test of his worth. There are indeed defections in his loves; sometimes serious defections. Sometimes there may come, by God's grace, sudden eruptions, higher love seemingly unwarranted by his antecedents. But in the main, as man's being matures, it becomes sealed with the stamp of his affections. The heart, whether we think of it symbolically or otherwise, is mightier than the brain as a supreme touchstone of our character. Long ago a Divine Voice said: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Again, we are human; not in a captious, but in a true sense of our concrete being. No psychology which ignores or subvalues our feelings is true to the facts. And in those feelings, what undefinable element enters, which issues not from logic nor from sense alone, but from the unsearchable tabernacles of the heart. Not cold abstractions of the mind, nor mere material calculations, spell our likes and loves. And in all that to which we interiorly incline—feel warm to, or against—our will itself seems to have rather an assenting than a commanding share. What ever calculations of these states of mind we may devise, the substance of their truth will impress us by any inspection of ourselves, our neighbors and of humanity.

Grace transmutes the motive forces and the values of our loves and acts. It blows where it listeth, and it is in a way as unanalyzable as our love itself. But it calls for our own responsiveness, and makes no home with us without our loving acceptance. It is invisible like our spirit, yet supremely real and potent in its mysterious union with us. Whether it issues in faith, whether perfected in charity, or persistent in fidelity, it is a divine thing beyond the coercions of our mind, but adheres to us by the yielding of our heart.

God, "Who knows what is in man," God "the searcher of hearts and reins," to win men's hearts devised the humanity of Christ. Man could dream to make himself a god. Men debased the Deity, or their imagined deities, into human forms to exercise their passions and share men's material pleasures and fortunes. Only God could conceive to make Himself a man in order to suffer for men. Men could devise holocausts and sacrifices to propitiate their deities. God alone could devise the sacrifice of Himself in mortal form to propitiate men, "that they might love Him with their whole heart," "that they might have life in His name."

How inconceivable and how admirable, how perfected to the last detail, and how wondrously harmonious and consistent in every part, are the devices of God's love! The humanity of Christ and His Passion; His sacraments of mercy and grace; His Church to keep His word before men as a living force and to perpetuate His sacrifice, His sacraments and His very Presence among men forever. Holy Communion, that transcending communion to each heart of His own being—yes, all perfected to the last imaginable reality of love seeking to unite itself to our love—and all to each. Wonderful mysteries all. But so is love itself a mystery. And God's love is the supreme mystery of all.

It is true that to non-Catholic minds today it is urgent to preach Christ's Divinity, especially to the large and vacuous number of people—dimmed in doubt and dizzily dinned with their alleged descent from brutes—who mostly upon scant imaginings have half lost their souls in the supposed ascent. Instead of holding to heart the traditions of their glorious origin from the Creator's hand, so readily echoed by the promptings of the spirit within them, they vaguely heed a babble of voices, all discordant, that seek to construct for that spirit a history from beasts and lower—a

spirit gradually fabricated by a marvelous self-uplifting transmutation from material molecules, and yet springing ready self evolved in each new child. What they deny that God can do they guess that matter can.

Scarcely daring—save a few—to abolish God altogether, they have largely cast Him aside from their hearts and love—an outlaw in the universe.

Little perhaps it is pondered that at the very surge of these hazy theories the infallible voice of Christ's Church still came to remind us, in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of our original innocence and noble estate; of our common origin from Adam and of Adam's fall, which brought the need of the Divine Redeemer.

To Catholics, however, with whom the Divinity of Christ is never in peril, it is well forever to recall His sacred humanity—the Man-Christ. Christ, the God-man, is as once a mystery and a fact made tangible in history. He holds the key to all the mysteries, and He holds the key to the heart.

The reality of His humanity and His life, His actual and persistent love and the tenderness of His heart, are perennially appealing. Through that humanity He unveiled the uncreated love of the Father Who made us. He taught the world to say, Our Father Who art in Heaven. In His love He promised not to leave us orphans.

How we long that we could say with the Apostle: "That which was in the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of life."

But we too know. Not alone at the tomb of Lazarus, but very truly for every one of us, when at last each in our miseries we approach the Holy Table to receive Him heart to heart—very truly as to each of us must the angels say: "See how He loves him."

The Prophet foretelling His day had written in His name: "I will give you a new heart. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel xxxvi, 26). And the Apostle thrice warned us: "Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith: Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

So in later days, to rekindle our love, we hear: "Behold the Heart that has so loved men." Had he not said Himself: "And he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father: and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him." (John xiv, 21).

In whatever form of words, it is clearly the same voice, the same love, the same heart. "Take heed, brethren, lest perhaps there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. But exhort one another every day whilst it is called today." (Hebrews iii, 13).

Father who art in Heaven; Christ, Lord and Saviour who made Yourself our brother; Mary Immaculate, handmaid of the Lord, whom He made His mother and whom He made our mother—where is true love if not with you and for you? Keep us in your love, for divine love is eternal life.

"Blessed be Christ, true God and true man.
Blessed be His most Sacred Heart."

"THE GODDESS OF WATER"

Last Monday there appeared in the Public Ledger an Associated Press dispatch from Mexico City. In this there was reference to the great drought there, and to the intercessions for rain that are being made in the Cathedral. It seems that the ecclesiastical authorities, wishing to arouse devotion, have brought from a neighboring village an ancient image of the Blessed Virgin which they have publicly exposed during certain days of prayer.

At the end of the official dispatch, and separated from it only by a printer's mark, or line, there follows an explanatory note which looks as though it were added by the Public Ledger. It is as follows:

"The Virgin de los Remedios is a wooden image about twelve inches high, evidently carved with a dull penknife. The carving bespeaks the work of the Indian. The statue is revered as the goddess of water."

The literal meaning of this note is clear. It conveys to the readers of the Public Ledger the information that the highest officials of the Catholic Church in Mexico are guilty of deliberately propagating idolatry. It is not a question of Indian superstition lingering in the remote, semi-civilized regions of a vast country. No. This devotion is taking place in one of the oldest and most famous Church buildings in the continent of America. The clergy of Mexico City are as intelligent and as cultured as any in the world. If the Public Ledger is correct in its information about the image, then these clergy must be equally well informed. And yet, we are told that they have deliberately brought to the notice of the public a statue which is regarded as a "goddess" into their principal church, and set it up in the place of God, to be venerated as the power which controls the forces of nature. There can be no escape from the conclusion.

We are, however, quite sure that if any one bluntly asked the Public Ledger the question, "Do you think that Catholics are idolaters?" that answer would immediately be given in the negative. Why then is this

stuff published? Does the Public Ledger think that it has to cater to ignorance, possibly in much the same way as it is implied that the educated priests of Mexico City cater to the superstitions of the Indians?

The Catholic Church is the largest religious organization in the United States of America. Its doctrine and practice are not secret. For a few cents any one can buy a catechism and find out exactly what the Church teaches in regard to the use of images in religious worship. The Catholic faith in Mexico is precisely the same as the Catholic faith in Philadelphia. The Public Ledger can make a visit to each of the churches in this city, and it will find at least one image of the Virgin in every church. If further information is needed the priests in these churches will be pleased to give it.

Or if the Public Ledger is suspicious of the veracity of the clergy, there exists an enormous literature on the subject of "Image Worship." Perhaps the Public Ledger is unaware of the fact that today practically every Protestant has accepted the principles of "Image Worship." There is hardly a Sunday school that does not give colored pictures of Christ to its scholars for the purpose of arousing interest and devotion. There is hardly a church of any denomination that does not possess stained glass windows in which are to be found images of the Saviour and of those connected with Him.

The story of how Christianity dealt with Christian art is a most interesting one and we commend it to the editorial staff of the enterprising daily.

We do not, however, suggest that there is either wilful ignorance or malice in this misrepresentation of Catholic worship. Such paragraphs slip in from careless habit. There is a journalistic style which refers to marriages as "quiet," to funerals as "simple," to church functions as "impressive." In much the same way it seems to be taken for granted that if any one prays for rain, or for other temporal blessings, that there is necessarily something superstitious about it. Moreover, the local coloring of Mexico is presented to demand Virgin worship. It sounds quite plausible that ignorant Mexican Indians should regard the Virgin as a goddess.

We do not suppose that the Public Ledger which is making prodigious efforts to increase its circulation, wishes to outrage the feelings of its Catholic readers. Being assured of this, we suggest more careful editing of Catholic news items.

The world needs peace. Those who stir up strife at the present time are enemies of the State. To misrepresent the deepest sentiments of the heart is calculated to increase ill-will among the citizens. We beg, then, to assure the Public Ledger, that there is not a Catholic who reads this well-known daily who would not be stirred to indignation at a statement which appears to brand the clergy of Mexico City as adherents to ignorance and superstition. We may also remind the Public Ledger that many intelligent Protestants have embraced the Catholic faith as a result of visiting Mexico. Were these persons converts to idolatry?—Philadelphia Standard and Times.

A LOSING GAME

To one who has ever doubted that money is the root of evil, a glance at the pages of the metropolitan press of the last six weeks is a reassurance. The only news worth a page of chronicle is the news of scandal in high life; of men and women murdering for money; of others violating the most sacred relations of husband and wife, for money; of sons and daughters blackening the name of father and mother, again for a miserable pittance of money. They gladly bear discomfort, and what to upright men is dishonor, they welcome. And the money that is their price of shame is soon dissipated. It is a game not worth trying.

The folly of laying up treasures that cannot last is a theme that has occupied the attention of the moralist for centuries. But men never learn. One generation succeeds to another, and every generation witnesses the same mad race for the things of this world. Of the competitors, the vast majority are doomed to fail. Those who apparently succeed are doomed to a failure that is keener. They soon discover that what they thought a prize is a curse. Money may buy power, but it cannot buy happiness. Power may bring station, but it does not guarantee peace. Power and station may erect a pedestal, but the man who stands upon it knows far better than the envious crowd at his feet, that the things that pass cannot satisfy the yearnings of the spirit. For man was created not for the perishable creations of earth, but for God.

There is the secret. The heart of man was made for God and nothing less than God can give it happiness. "About a year before he died," writes B. C. Forbes, in the financial column of the New York American, "James Stillman confided to me that while he had piled up millions of dollars, he regarded his life as a failure. Stillman left some forty or fifty million dollars, but little else." Engrossed in money-making, he had no time for the sacrifices which cement friendship, "and he had failed to draw to him even the members of his own family." His gold and silver could not give him happiness during his lifetime. What do they mean to him now?

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Wealth can bring a measure of happiness, but only when it is used as Almighty God wishes it to be used when the man to whom it has been confided looks upon himself simply as the steward of God's poor. What he needs for the reasonable requirements of his station, he may use without scruple. What is left belongs to the service of God. The man who seeks to pile millions upon millions, while closing his ears to the cry of the distressed, may find what he seeks, but to him and to his children and his children's children, it will be a curse.—America.

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

During the month of July the Church calls our attention in a particular way to the Precious Blood of Christ. We first knew the value of the Precious Blood on Good Friday afternoon. We stood at the foot of the Cross when our Lord was shedding that Blood for the redemption of the world. On that day the Church was in tears and lamentations. Now the thought of the Blood of Christ makes her burst into songs of gladness and triumph.

The Feast of the Precious Blood is a monument to one of the most brilliant victories of our Holy Mother Church. The saintly Pius IX. was driven from Rome in 1848 by the triumphant revolution. On June 28 of the following year his power was re-established in Rome. The eldest daughter of the Church swept the ramparts of the Eternal City. While the Pope was in Exile he addressed himself to the invisible Head of the Church, reminding Him that it was for her that He had vouchsafed to shed His Precious Blood. During his exile he had as companion the superior of the Fathers of the Most Precious Blood. The superior suggested to the Pope that he make a vow to extend the Feast of the Precious Blood to the entire Church if he would again obtain possession of the Eternal City. The Holy Father promised that he would immediately extend the Feast to all Christendom. The establishment of this Feast of the Most Precious Blood to the Universal Church is a monument to the gratitude of the Vicar of Christ to the invisible Head of the Church. The Precious Blood of Christ had not been shed in vain.

The Precious Blood still remains with us as the treasure of the world. It is for us "the chalice of benediction." It is the means and the

pledge of the Divine allegiance. Its continued effusion renewed in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar has hushed the cry of vengeance that the blood of Abel had sent up from earth to heaven. During this month of July our hearts should bear new fruits of love that have budded forth

and are watered by the fruitifying dew of the Precious Blood of Christ.—Catholic Sun.

That which we suffer in the accomplishment of a good work, merits for us the necessary graces to insure its success.—St. Vincent de Paul.



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