

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. P. FEFFERS

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths." (Luk. iii, 4)

The words "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" were addressed by St. John to the Jews, but they are addressed also to us. We are called upon to do what we can, in order that Christ may come by grace into our hearts and fill them more and more with it. We ought to do this now, more than at any other season, for Christmas is close at hand, and it behooves us to pray earnestly day by day, surveying our sins and shortcomings and striving to correct them, whilst we think often of God and try with all our might to do His will. If we take pains to offer willing hearts to our Lord, we shall deserve to be cleansed, strengthened and sanctified by His grace at Christmas. Then this great festival will bring us all the benefits that the Church intends, for the festivals of Holy Church are profitable to us only if we prepare our hearts for them by true purposes of amendment, and not if we look forward to them with careless indifference.

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Let us remember St. John's admonition before each of the great feasts, and let it remind us to prepare for its celebration by fervent devotion and renewed efforts to lead a virtuous life. There is, however, no season of the year when it is not our duty to prepare our hearts for the Lord. Every day that dawns ought to bid us prepare His way, and bring us nearer to Him, and pour His grace more abundantly into our souls.

As we have already seen, the practice of making pious meditations will help us greatly in our efforts to prepare the way of the Lord. We considered last week the importance and the manner of making meditations, but there is one point connected with the matter that requires further study. Some one may ask what subjects we ought to select for meditation.

There are innumerable subjects that, if we meditate upon them, will supply us with holy thoughts and will suggest good resolutions, for, as the Psalmist says: "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands" (Ps. xviii, 2). All nature in her wonderful beauty furnishes us with abundant material for meditation, and our Lord Himself has condescended to nature when He said: "Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matth. vi, 26). "Consider the lilies how they grow; they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these" (Luk. xii, 27). There are other passages, too, in which our Lord refers to the sparrows on the roof, and to the hairs on our head, in order to stimulate our feelings of confidence, gratitude and love of God.

Yet, although Christ Himself referred frequently to nature, natural objects ought not to form the usual basis of our meditation, since the human heart is more influenced by the truths made known to us by divine revelation, and especially by the infinite, incomprehensible love with which God so loved the world as to send His only begotten Son into the world, and give us with Him all salvation, all truth, and all the means of grace, without which it would be impossible for us to reach heaven.

The ordinary subjects of our meditation should be Jesus Christ, His revelation and the gifts of His grace, and we ought, as St. Paul says, to desire to know nothing save Christ crucified. Following therefore the holy Apostle's example, let us take as subjects for meditation, not the wonders of nature, but rather the truths belonging to the order of grace. Although nature in her manifold outward manifestations seems to raise our thoughts to things above herself, but can only point out the way to God from a distance, and even then she is no infallible guide. Meditating on the beauties and wonders of nature may flatter the imagination, but it does not supply strength and comfort to the heart or encourage it to make good resolutions. Such meditation may suggest beautiful thoughts and sentiments, but it cannot inspire us to perform actions demanding mortification and self denial. It may give rise to the exalted flights of the intellect, but it does not enable a man to bear with patience his lot in life if it is hard and wearisome. Yes, unless we have previously learned how to meditate upon the unchanging truths of divine revelation, mere contemplation of nature can only too easily become an opportunity for indulging the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes and the pride of life.

Nature worship led the Pagans of old into idolatry and suggested to them the mad idea that it was possible to serve their gods by means of crimes. Even in our own day the study of nature by a sensual mind, devoid of all higher light, often results in the worship of nature and of self, in unbelief and in the immorality to which unbelief gives rise.

It is impossible, therefore, to say that nature ought to supply us with our chief subjects for meditation; it cannot supply us with any at all unless they be regarded from a truly Christian point of view.

The mysteries of God's revelation are, above all things, the subjects upon which we ought to meditate with humility of heart. But they are very numerous—choose of them ought we especially to choose?

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Some of them are calculated to awaken our hope in God or our fear of Him; others tend to stimulate our gratitude and love. To the first class belong the solemn truths regarding death, judgment and hell, and, when we meditate upon them, we are deeply moved and impelled to despise the things of earth and to set our desires upon those of eternity. To the second class belong the mysteries concerning the life and Passion of Christ, and God's infinite perfection, for we cannot contemplate His majesty, goodness, wisdom, etc., without feeling love, thankfulness, joy and admiration. Finally, there are other meditations also belonging to the order of grace, in which we base our reflections upon the acts, the self surrender, the victories and triumphs of some particular saints. Above all, one of our favorite subjects should be the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a life containing many examples for us all of purity, humility and obedience, and full of faith and confidence in God and of love.

For all Christ acts, with no distinction of age or position, are those connected with our Lord's Passion. He displayed as in a mirror all the virtues pleasing to God and truly heroic, and from Him we derive consolation in all the circumstances of life and strength to enable us to do right. The Cross of Christ was the book constantly studied by the saints, from which they learned the way to heaven. They never were weary of regarding themselves in this mirror of souls. Let us form the habit of saying to ourselves on every occasion: "This is how Jesus behaved; this is how He spoke, judged and acted; such were His dispositions in circumstances resembling my own. Thus would He think, speak and act, were He in my position."

If we keep the eyes of our mind fixed constantly on Him, our great and holy Example, we shall see plainly enough how we may best prepare the way of the Lord, and which path will lead us to heaven. May He guide us on our road and may we follow Him faithfully. Amen.

TEMPERANCE

THE "STOCKHOLM SYSTEM"

Sweden has adopted a new and original method of dealing with the liquor problem. Its inventor is Dr. Ivan Bratt and it is known as the "Stockholm system." Its purpose is to place a limit to the amount of intoxicating liquor allowed to any individual. Citizens in good standing can thus partake of such beverages within the bounds of moderation, as officially interpreted for them, but are prevented from falling into excess. Dr. Bratt, as might be expected, has been accused by some of being too moderate and by others of being too extreme in his reform. The fact is that the system is to go into effect for the entire Swedish nation after the first of January. Hitherto it has already been in operation in thirty-one of the one hundred districts into which Sweden is divided, and during the past year is said to have decreased the consumption of liquor from 5,004,542 liters to 2,979,682 liters.

DRINKING DOESN'T PAY

A well known novelist, who was for years a moderate drinker, writes his experience in McClure's Magazine. He found in the end that it did not pay. "I should be born in mind,"

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he says, "that I am not dealing with confirmed drunkenness, drinking that has become an organic necessity, tuberculosis, and must be so considered and treated. I am dealing with the custom of drinking as it is practiced by the great majority of men who drink at all. And, for that very reason, I think that testimony like mine should be suggestive and valuable. I have absolutely no prejudice against the custom; and yet, though I never abused it, socially speaking, and am still a worshipper of Dionysus from afar, I do not hesitate to declare that moderate drinking does not pay."

"I have tried it. I know. No one can tell me anything about its joys and satisfactions. I have also tried total abstinence. As a consequence I feel better, sleep better, work better, enjoy life more, and have increased my usefulness as a citizen."

A NEW EXCUSE FOR DRINKING

In Springfield, Mass., the other day, a man arrested for drunkenness added a new one to the many reasons or rather excuses, given by men as to why they drink. We all know about the man who drinks to drown his grief, and the other man who drinks to celebrate his joy; of the man who drinks to keep cool in summer and the one who does the same thing to keep warm in winter; of the man who takes a drink in the morning to start the day right, and the man who drinks at night to compose his nerves and induce sleep—and so on. But this fellow in Springfield invented a new one. He said he was compelled to take whisky to cure him of lameness! Most people who drink discover that their potatoes interfere with their powers of locomotion, but this Springfield man declared that unless he drank, his powers of locomotion did not function well at all. He had been struck by an automobile some little time before, he said, and was so injured in the left leg that unless he took whisky he could not walk without a limp.—Sacred Heart Review.

THE LURE OF THE FIRESIDE

The Christmas season seems to be the proper time to call the attention of Catholic parents to one of the many factors that are quickly and surely breaking up the home. It is not true that the dullness which only too often characterizes the modern Catholic home drives the children to the omnipresent "movie" house, the club and, worst of all, the Y. M. C. A. Is it not true that the indifference of Catholic parents to the amusements of their children is the root cause of much of their estrangement from the fireside?

Children will always be children. They love noise. They must make noise, if they are normal and healthy at all. The boy who never plays a prank or never lets out a whoop should be taken to the doctor, for there is something fundamentally wrong with him. You cannot keep the little ones at their books from the hour that follows immediately after supper until bedtime. Children learn quickly—and especially their lessons—and with the "study periods" which have been introduced into the modern schools there are long stretched hours in the lives of the children which may be filled up one way or another.

Of course the father, wearied with a long day's hard work dreads the pandemonium of the fireside. He has been thumping all day to the sound of hammer or machine. He desires peace, and he can easily forgive him—a few hours of quiet in which to think or read the daily papers, or hold converse with his wife. And she, just as anxiously as her consort, wants a few moments of silence after the day's anxieties and labor. Most mothers' nerves are quite on edge by nightfall. No wonder that she is willing to do almost anything—even if it need be to tuck the youngsters into bed—in order to have a few moments to herself.

Now, Catholic parents lose a glorious opportunity of binding the affections of their children to them for ever when, in a moment of weakness or weariness, they try to rid themselves of the company of their little ones in the evening. The children whose nights are always spent at the "movies" soon lose a taste for the pleasures of home. Boys and girls who are driven night after night to athletics in order to while away the long hours, may be sowing in themselves that which will sooner or later break down their physical fitness and their mental balance.

The desire for excitement which has become so characteristic a mark of the growing generation is due in large part to the lack of recreational amusement at home. Such games as dominoes and checkers, which were good enough for our fathers and mothers, and served admirably to distract their minds from the day's worries and at the same time helped to sharpen their mental equipment, should be rehabilitated in the home. There are a dozen other forms of amusement which have gone out of date because of the rush of our modern life. It is a remarkable fact that with all America's inventive genius, the production of children's games for the home has fallen off noticeably, as the records of the Patent Office in Washington clearly show. Still, withal, there are some games to furnish recreation and amusement to the growing-up generation, if they were but put to use.

procure one or several games for the home. First of all, it would keep the youngsters amused indoors, a much safer place for them than even the "movies," since even the most strictly censored films frequently contain suggestive and doubtful scenes and episodes. The dark streets, the dance halls, the cabaret shows, the pool rooms, the cigar stores and saloons, where the boys learn to smoke cigarettes and listen to shady stories—all these our young folk will be able to avoid if parents succeed in making home interesting and the long evenings not intolerably dull.

In the second place, the introduction of reposeful games in the home will give parents an opportunity of creeping closer and closer to the hearts of their own. For the healthy young boy will always enjoy playing a game with father, if he has a chance to beat him at it. And if father takes his "trimming" with good grace there will be established between them and camaraderie which will be the surest protection for the boy against the appeals of our modern artificial life.—The Rosary Magazine.

ONE SURE SOURCE OF PREJUDICE

Appropos of the K. of C.'s investigation of the sources of prejudices against Catholics in this country, the Monitor says: "We have not yet seen a full statement of their deliberations; but we look for a very interesting and important document. In the meantime, we would like to submit to the Catholic public one phase of the bigoted situation which we are all prone to more or less overlook. In many cases the prejudices which exist in the minds of non Catholics against the Church, is created, fostered and perpetuated therein by the disgraceful and discrediting conduct of Catholics themselves. Every Catholic who becomes intoxicated is an argument to the uninstructed non Catholic that the Church does not consider drunkenness a crime. Every action of deceit, dishonesty or other disgraceful proceeding entailing sin upon the Catholic soul, creates a hatred against our holy religion in the hearts of those who only know its dogmas through the conduct of those Catholics whom they see around them. Good example on the part of many practical Catholics has led millions of souls to embrace the true faith, while the bad example of loose moral Catholics has made well meaning Protestants shudder at the religion that is professed by so many who morally sin against God by their habitual vices."

TRIBUTE TO THE PAPACY

BY A PROTESTANT SCHOLAR

When the Hague Peace Tribunal was established and it was predicted that war would be no more, the Holy Father was not allowed admittance to the portals of the Peace Temple. But the irony of history has asserted itself, for the present moment, while the world conflict rages, the pretentious Hague Peace Temple stands like another Tower of Babel—a monument to man's overweening presumption while the spurned Prisoner of the Vatican looms up as the greatest peace factor. Thanks to interposition of Italy, the Curia was excluded from the deliberations. Perhaps it will appear in coming peace negotiations as the exponent of neutral nations, if not a more important task will be assigned to it.

This statement quoted does not emanate from a Catholic source, but it has as its author Professor Walter Kohler of the (Protestant) theological faculty of the university in Zurich, Switzerland, and it is to be found in an article "Die Christliche Welt" (The Christian World), an angelical organ intended for the educated classes. The article, "The Papacy and the World War," is so replete with sound, judgment and impartial analysis that we translate portions thereof for our readers.

"All differentiations along national lines," says Professor Kohler, "together with their attendant manifestations, are, in their last analysis, only social coincidences, and it is to the universal structure of the Catholic Church rears itself aloft over such accidental conditions and her adherents, though scattered by the chance contingencies of national states, are simultaneously members of the supernatural Catholic Church. This abrupt precipitation from nationalism to universalism produces singular results. One cannot refer to the fact that the German and English Protestants, besides belonging to the German and English nations, are supernationally Protestant. He who contends thus overlooks the fact that Catholic supernaturality is a compact sociological body, whereas that of the Protestants is merely one of community of ideas. And how thin, how alarmingly thin, this common Protestant feeling of solidarity is, in view of the political realities born of national sentiment, we have learned to satisfaction. Protestantism knows no sociological church, only churches, national churches, and even their names reveal the closest adherence to national interests. Catholicism combines all its members, regardless of nationality, into one universal body, whose head is the Pope in Rome. Obviously from this standpoint the national coherence of Catholicism is, therefore, less pronounced than is that of Protestantism. This is no reproach, but

lies in the nature of things; adherents to the international body thus tends to assert itself in the national framework, and occasionally makes anti-national claims, whereupon the political world speaks of "ultramontanism." The latter has not occurred in the present war, but that this tendency is recognized, as a natural right, reveals the cultural necessity of making concessions to national contingencies. The Church, as such, as custodian of supernatural revelation, will not pronounce in favor of a war of nationalities; she has carried on the struggle against infidelity herself and is still capable, for she is thereby protecting herself; but her universality and supernatural character will preserve her from the world war."

Paying a glowing tribute to the peace efforts of Pope Benedict XV., Professor Kohler continues: "The Law of Guarantees, in the turmoil of the world war, has been abrogated; the Pope no longer feels secure in Rome, and has all reasons therefor. Spain has invited him to migrate to its neutral soil; the Benedictine Abbey, the Maria Einsiedeln, had hopes of harboring Pope Benedict XV. as guest; but a transfer of the Curia from Rome has a different aspect from that of the departure

from Italy of a German or Austrian to neutral territory. It is more than questionable that such a step would really remove the difficulties. . . . However, it is conceivable and justifiable that there should be a desire to see the Pope represented at the coming peace congress, and that the Roman question be solved.

"Thanks to the interposition of Italy, the Curia was excluded from participation in the Hague deliberations. Perhaps it will appear in the coming peace negotiations as the exponent of neutral nations, if not a more important task will be assigned to it."

"Powers who have hitherto held aloof, like England and Holland, have sent accredited representatives, or propose to do so. Whether or not a solution of the Roman question will be effected is to be left to the future. The problem of the legal status of the spiritual sovereigns, the rest of territory is so complicated that every prediction is hazardous. It is to be hoped that the establishment of peace, as in other respects, will bring about, particularly in this case, a permanently satisfactory condition of affairs. This would lend a new perspective to the relation between the State and the Catholic Church in general."—Truth.

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