

## FIVE MINUTE SERMON

THE REV. F. P. HICKEN, O. S. B.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST

## THE STATE OF GRACE

"The grace of God that is given to you in Christ Jesus." (1 Cor. I. 4.)

Grace is the gift of God and the life of our soul. By it we participate in the divine nature. If we preserve our souls in the state of grace in life, we make certain of our everlasting reward and glory hereafter. Grace is given to us by God freely, lovingly, generously; our solicitude and daily endeavour must be to preserve it in our souls. But how few of us value it as we should! In the world how many do not believe in grace: reject it for a whim, a pleasure, an indulgence of their passions! And yet it is the all-important thing for each of us to preserve our soul in the state of grace. Yet can we know for sure whether we are in the state of grace?—for Scripture tells us that man knows not whether he is worthy of love or hatred—that is, whether he is in the favour and friendship of God, or whether sin has driven grace from his soul, and left it "poor and miserable and naked" in the sight of his heavenly Father.

True, we cannot know for certain; but there are signs, which guarantee us a moral certainty, sufficient for a solid hope to be built on it, that we are friends with God, and have grace within our souls. "The grace of God that is given to you in Christ Jesus." Let us examine these signs, these tests, to help us to be solicitous and earnest in treasuring this heavenly gift.

The first is the testimony of our conscience. Conscience acknowledges that we have sinned, but can also claim that we have done that which is required for sin to be forgiven; that we need not fear that those sins of which we have repented can be our accusers at the Judgment. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." (1 John I. 9.) This testimony of our conscience is one of the greatest tests of grace, because we are only judged according to our conscience. We must "endeavour to have always a conscience without offence towards God and towards man." (Acts xxiv. 16.)

The second sign or test that we are in the state of grace, given us both by St. Leo the Great and St. Augustine, is fraternal charity. Truly, if we have God within us by His grace, how can we not have a little of the love and charity of God towards our brethren the well-beloved children of the same Father? St. John tells us, "If God hath so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John IV. 19.)

If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us. (1 John IV. 11, 12.) "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren" (1 John III. 14.) And what is the life of our soul but "the grace of God, given to us in Christ Jesus?" Fraternal charity indeed is the great sign, the moral certitude of predestination, that the grace of God exists supreme in our soul. "As fire produces heat," says St. Bruno, "so grace produces charity." Charity diffuses itself to all and in all things, simply for the love of God. We see God in the poor, the suffering, the dying and the souls in purgatory, and it is to Him, through them, that we extend our sympathy, our kindness, and our help. And if we are thus charitable for God's sake it is not that we love Him, or, at least, are striving to love Him? To love God is not that a sign, a test, a sure proof that we are already in the grace of God?

Remember the example of that religious, an ordinary religious as far as man could judge, who, when dying, knew no terror or anguish. His eyes were raised upwards so calmly, so hopefully, there was evidence of such peace of soul, that his superior asked him, was there no cause of sorrow or fear from the past? It is very true, the dying man replied, I have been careless and tepid, yet in spite of past infidelities I die in peace, because I have never judged my brethren, and I have the word of Jesus Christ, "Judge not, and thou shalt not be judged." My God, pardon me, as I have pardoned others; bear me no ill-will, as I have borne none to others; forget my sins and iniquities, as I have forgotten anything that others have done to me. Grant me measure for measure; pity for pity; kindness for kindness. What a testimony does fraternal charity thus bear to our souls, that we are in the state of grace!

The last sign to be mentioned is this, and it grows out of the two preceding tests. If our conscience has not to reproach us with sin, if the love of God is urging us to the practice of fraternal charity, a light, a heavenly light illuminates our souls, revealing to us the nothingness, the paltriness, the vileness of this world and of all that it can offer us; and revealing to us, on the other hand, the beauty of the life of grace, giving us a relish of the supernatural, our prayers, our Holy Communions, yea, even a love of patient suffering, and a longing desire for heaven. Thus the light of grace leads us safely along the humble path that leads to life eternal. Let us pray for holy fear, lest we should lose reverence and

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care for the preservation of grace within us. How this life seems to fade away and lose all fascination to attract us; and how near the brightness of heaven seems, because of "the grace that is given to us in Christ Jesus."

## OUR BLESSED LADY

TRIBUTE OF ST. BERNARD

There is perhaps no more beautiful tribute to the name of Our Blessed Mother than the words of her devoted client, the great St. Bernard: "Whosoever thou art, seest thyself, amid the tides of this world, tossed about by storms and tempests rather than walking on the land, turn not thine eyes away from the shining of this star if thou wouldst not be overwhelmed by the hurricane. If squalls of temptations arise, or thou faltest upon the rocks of tribulation look to the star, call upon Mary. If thou art tossed by the waves of pride or ambition, detraction or envy, look to the star, call upon Mary. If anger or avarice or the desires of the flesh dash against the ship of thy soul, turn thine eyes towards Mary. If, troubled by the enormity of thy crimes, ashamed of thy guilty conscience, terrified by the dread of judgment, thou beginnest to sink into the gulf of sadness or the abyss of despair, think of Mary.

"In dangers, in anguish, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary, let her be ever on thy lips, ever in thy heart; and the better to obtain the help of her prayers imitate the example of her life. Following her, thou strayest not; invoking her, thou despairest not; thinking of her, thou wanderest not; upheld by her, thou faltest not; shielded by her, thou fearest not; guided by her, thou growest not weary; favored by her thou reachest the goal. And thus dost thou experience in thyself how good is the saying: 'And the Virgin's name was Mary.'"

## THE SOULS IN DURESS

Social work is the great demand of our age. As in the days of Ozanam, so now men test our faith by the expression we give to it in social deeds. There is social work in the tenements, factories and at home, there is social work in the wide regions of the Catholic missions abroad, there is social work in the famine-stricken areas of Europe where our gifts may bring relief from misery and starvation. In all these fields the Catholic can be active, but there is still another sphere of human suffering to which his charity must go out, the state of Purgatory, from which no tabulated accounts, in figures and statistics, will ever reach us of the anguish there endured, but where we know that our help is most greatly needed. To the souls there imprisoned, until they have atoned for the least and the last of their transgressions, unless our charity comes to their aid, we are bound by social ties in the greatest of all societies, the Communion of the Saints. To them, too, must our social work extend.

It was this thought that St. Francis de Sales so beautifully suggested and developed when he said that in burrowing relief to the poor souls in Purgatory we practise almost all the works of mercy at one and the same time. We are thus offering true comfort and consolation to those in sorrow. We are assisting by our deeds the afflicted whom the hand of the Lord has touched. We are entering the prison-house of Divine justice, and by our Masses and prayers are lightening the chains of the prisoners, or breaking their bonds to set them free. We are practising hospitality, not indeed by inviting these friends of God to enter under our own roof-tree, but by assisting them to pass from their abode of pain into the home of Our Father who is in Heaven, into the mansions of His glory into which we ourselves hope to enter. There they will await us, but first will they repay a thousandfold our gentle services by their mighty intercession at the Throne of God.

We are, in fine, clothing the naked, not in poor earthly garments, such as we might bestow upon the

beggar at our gate, but in robes of unfading splendor. For we know them now to be pining in pitiful anguish and poverty, divested of the comfort, joy and brightness that had once been theirs in life. The love of God indeed still remains with them, but this is the greatest of all their torments that they now long for Him with untold yearnings, yet cannot reach Him unless our efforts hasten the day of their release. Thus can we exercise towards these our brethren the social words of mercy. It is not because of our own strength that we achieve these marvels of charity, but by the mercy of God which applies according to His Divine love and wisdom the offerings that we make for them.

To know in full the secrets of God's prison-house is not given to us here, but we can well understand how great beyond our comprehension those sufferings must be where the souls that departed in the Divine grace are still to be purified in the chastening justice of an infinitely pure and holy God, until every least stain of earthly vanity, every last remnant of the dross and stubble of life has been cleansed away. They "shall be saved, yet so as by fire." By the greatness of their agony and the greatness of God's love for these souls we can estimate the greatness of that charity that now comes to their relief and performs for them all those sweet offices of mercy we have just described. They are the friends of God, His Saints in duress. Thrice blessed therefore are the merciful who show them mercy, for God will bestow in return the gifts of His mercy on them.—America.

## LIFE'S SORROWS

A continuous line of tragedy runs throughout the whole of life. The black line, trailed along our track, is ever marking down the good and bad, the guilty and guiltless with seeming unconcern—and yet there is a God who made all and rules over all. It is a mystery. But in the teaching of the Catholic Church we find the only solution that at all satisfies the mind, while it tends also to ennoble our conduct. It is a key to the mystery, rather than a completely made solution.

This is her teaching, that life as we actually know it is in its suffering, the expiation for sin.

The world, as we know it, is not as God made it. Sin has marred its beauty and destroyed its consistency as a perfect work; sin, the wrong use by man of his noblest gift, free will.

How one man's sin can work for misery and suffering we know but too well, from the history, let us say, of a drunken parent, leaving, to his children the full heritage of physical and moral disease. How, again, the selfishness of one generation of men can poison the wells of social life for more generations to come is seen in the history of the Reformation, with its rampant individualism. And that evil which has been brought about by sin or selfishness must be paid for by human suffering.

For good and for evil the life of one man is bound up with the life of other men; no man stands alone; we are a family both by nature and by grace, with a corporate life and responsibility. Therefore, it is that we have to bear the burden of one another's sin, as we share also in the glory of one another's good works.

The right view of suffering, therefore, is that of an expiation for sin, not only for our own sin, but the world's sin, too.

The innocent babe that dies in agony gains something of a martyr's crown of glory; its suffering is the payment of a debt not its own, and yet its own because it is one of mankind; and it becomes more closely allied to Christ because of its suffering.

The man or woman consciously accepting the cross, with its nameless horrors, becomes thereby a leader, because willingly bearing the burden of others; and according to the generosity of their acceptance is the degree of their eternal glory.

No wonder that so many have regarded it as a privilege to suffer, not from morbid sentiment, but from a healthy recognition of Christian principles. "These are they who have washed their garments in the Blood of the Lamb. Their youth is renewed like that of an eagle; as the lily shall they flourish in the city of the Lord."—The Missionary.

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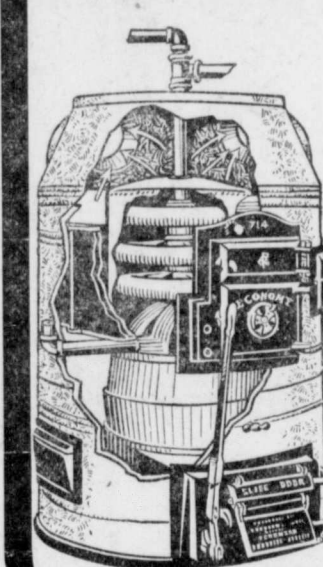
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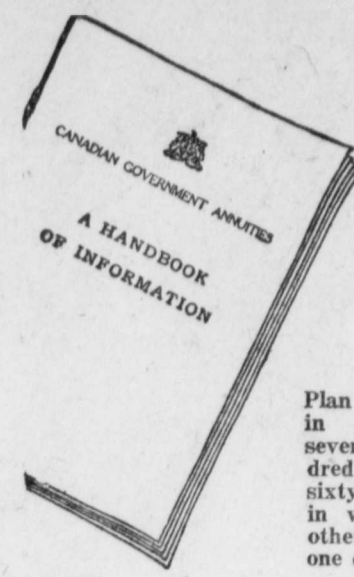
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