

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

Rev. F. P. Hickey, O. S. B.
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

NOW

"Now is the acceptable time." (2 Cor. vi. 2.)

Lent is given us to repent and put our souls in order, that we may do as we are warned in that prayer and responsive to day. "Let us amend and do better for those things in which we have sinned, through ignorance, lest suddenly prevented by the day of death, we seek time for penance and be not able to find it."

Seek time! Why, we have plenty of time. Be not too sure. Time is made of past, present and future. We have existed, we do exist, and we must exist for ever. For most of us, the past has spoiled the present, and endangered the future.

Oh, that dreadful past! Past time, past sins, past graces and chances neglected. The time that has gone, was given us with which to work out our salvation, in which to treasure up good deeds in heaven. If we were now judged by the past, should we not be empty-handed indeed? Our excuse is, "Oh, the past has gone so quickly that we have not had time to do much for God." What inconsistency! We have no time for prayer, and yet we are often so dull, so miserable, that we talk of killing time. We do not know how to get through the slow, crawling hours of a monotonous life. A past lost hour can never be recalled. How, perhaps, we shall long for a little time—a few minutes more—some day, some night! When the priest has been sent for, when it is a race between him and death—oh, past time, that has been wasted, may terrify us then!

Then the sins of the past urge us to be earnest in Lent. "Be not without fear for sin forgiven." (Eccles. v. 5.) Let us not think of the utterly bad, but of our own careless selves. Our blessed faith removes mountains of dirt and fear, because we have the Sacrament of Penance to forgive us; and we have come to it many a time, and devoutly, too, we hope. We thank Heaven that we can seek absolution in Confession. Yet sins of the past have, perhaps, formed bad habits, have left weaknesses in our souls, for we find that we fall so easily again. Sins of the past should humble us, and instil fear into us lest we relapse.

Past graces, chances, blessings? How few acted up to manfully! how many put off, forgotten, let pass by, as if they mattered not! And oh! what an insult to the Great God to delay to act up to, to refuse to accept His grace and blessings!

Oh! we will do better for the future. We have all often made that resolution. But who has a future? How long will it last? God has promised no future time, not even a day. And the eternal future—how soon it may be here!—is for reward or punishment. The future, we can count on, is nothing. We picture the future so bright and happy: it is going to be a wonderful time. My dear brethren, the future is like the glory of a sunset, the Alpine glow upon the mountains, inspiring, almost spiritual; but it does not last. It turns into the cold grey of evening and the darkness of night, whilst our wondering eyes are watching it. The future is gone.

Then, what is left us but the present? And the present is just today—now. It lasts no length of time; to-morrow it will be the past. The present! Take hold of it at once. You cannot be sure of it till it comes; you cannot overtake it when it was gone.

Thank God for the present, fleeting though its moments are. What would the lost give for one half-hour of present time to kneel and confess their sins! What would a poor soul from Purgatory give for another Mass attended, another Holy Communion! We have the time, the opportunity.

For "now is the acceptable time." Lent is not like ordinary present time. It is the acceptable time when God's grace is more plentiful; prayer goes further; when there is forgiveness for all who seek it. God does not look for saints at the beginning of Lent. All our Blessed Lord asks for is a willing heart, ready to day, now, to begin a good Lent—ready to give up sin. Therefore, prepare for a good confession by prayer, by sorrow, by checking yourself in sinning. Then will your Easter confession be a good one. Ready again to learn to love God, by attending church more regularly and devoutly; by not missing a service that you can get to, in Lent; by listening to sermons, or reading a pious book; by adding a little to your devotions during Lent.

And if we have not this much goodwill, readiness, let us be humble and afraid. Do not put God off "lest you seek for time for penance and find it not."

For whom is it that we have to be willing and ready to do our best now—in this acceptable time? For Him of Whom it is said, "Whilst as yet we were sinners." Christ died for us. (Rom. v. 8, 9.) Repeat those words, and then refuse our Blessed Saviour! The evening before He died, He left us the Blessed Sacrament—"Do this in commemoration of Me." Dare you refuse Him to go to your Easter Communion? Dare you put Him off and say, "Not now, some other year?" And He shed His precious Blood, the price of the world's redemption, and He died on the cross for our salvation. And dare we turn our back upon Him?

"Some other time, not now!"

My dear brethren, good people will say, "Surely no one will ever say

that—no one could be as bad as that." It is only too true.

Everyone who misses Mass willfully this Lent, is saying it and doing it. Everyone who will not give up a sinful habit, a wicked companion, money he has got unjustly, hatred and spite against a neighbour, is implicitly saying that to God. He prefers his sins to God's redemption.

Pray God that we may never be found amongst these. "Now is the acceptable time." We are grateful for it, O Lord—for another chance. We are grateful, willing, anxious to spend a devout Lent; praying, repenting, loving Thee now in this acceptable time. "I suddenly prevented by the day of death, we seek time for penance and be not able to find it."

TEMPERANCE

HIS "UNCLE" DIDN'T WANT HIM

An amusing story, but one full of cold truth, was recently reported by the Greensburg (Penn.) Record, of a young man who tried to enlist in the army in that town.

"Sergeant Hackett, U. S. A., is no temperance lecturer," the Record says, "but he is a strong advocate of practical sobriety. Yesterday a young man of foreign parentage told Sergeant Hackett that he desired to join the army. The young man brought with him the suppressed fumes of whiskey and his unsteady step and flush on his cheek sent out a 'wireless' that he was partly 'lit up.'"

"This is the place to enlist," said the sergeant, "but you had better come back when you haven't got a drink."

"Oh, I'm all right," replied the candidate. "I can fight."

"The sergeant asked for a draft notice card, and was thickly told that it had been lost."

"Well, you'd better go home and find it or go to your exemption board and get another. Then cut out the drink business and come back and we'll see what can be done."

The Record continues: "The husky youngster 'felt' his way out of the room and down the stairs. The sergeant smiled to find a friend and remarked that he did not do business with a man that was half shot; that now and then a fellow rushed in under the influence of liquor, but that no attention was paid to him."

"Sergeant Hackett has been a long time in Uncle Sam's army, and he knows that liquor is a hindrance to efficiency. There is no booze in Soldier Hackett's squad."

JUDGE SAYS LIQUOR CAUSES 90% OF DIVORCES

Judge W. H. McHenry, recently district Judge of Des Moines, has issued a statement in which he says:

"I have recently been asked this question, 'Why are you for prohibition?' and as I answered it then, I will answer it now: Thirty-five years ago, I began to practice law, and from that time to the present I have spent my life in an environment where I have constantly been face to face with the cruel and cursed consequences of drunkenness. I have seen my neighbor boys of school days, ruined by liquor, convicted of crime, their families disgraced and pauperized; I have seen them rotten with disease and insane as the result of drunkenness."

"I was judge of the district court of Polk county for fifteen years, and in the discharge of my duty was compelled to send my playmates of childhood days to penitentiaries, inebriate asylums and to jail as a consequence of saloons in Des Moines."

"During that fifteen years on the bench, I spent four years in the criminal division. I sent more than a thousand men to penitentiaries and jails for criminal offences committed by them, and I know that 90% of these crimes were caused by drunkenness originating in saloons."

"I granted more than 1,000 divorces and I know that 90% of them were the consequences of drunkenness and the drunkenness was due to the saloon. I have taken thousands of children from the homes of drunkards and placed them in State institutions for public protection and education whose homes were ruined by drunkenness. I have seen and know the moral depravity, the poverty, disgrace, the ruined hopes of mothers and children, the insane asylums and poorhouses crowded until the accumulated curses that I have seen spring from the presence of the saloon condemn that institution as the vilest influence that infects this world to day."—St. Paul Bulletin.

AVOID HUMAN RESPECT

A girl who was on her way to work was overtaken by a man employed at the same place, and they walked along together, chatting as they went. They had to pass a church on the way, and the girl was in the habit of making a daily visit there.

As they came near, she began to be tempted to pass without going in. What would her companion think? She hated to be called a fanatic, a devotee, or a little queer! Besides it sometimes injured one, in a business

way, to be religious, particularly a Catholic.

The next morning the man was a little later and said, in a rather shamefaced way, that he had followed her good example, and had also gone into the church on his way down.

"Oh! Then you are a Catholic! I am so glad," she said.

"Some months later he said to her: 'Miss Blake, I owe you a great deal, and I cannot feel satisfied until I have told you about it and thanked you.'"

"You owe me a great deal? Why, how can that be?"

"Well," he answered, "you remember the morning we walked down together and you left me and went into the church? I had almost given up the practice of my religion. But your little act, so simply performed, awoke in my heart a desire for better things, and the next morning I also went into the church. After that I made my daily visit, like yourself and soon returned to my duties and, I need not tell you, to peace and joy of heart. If everyone were as courageous as you, how soon the world would be better."

"Ah," she thought, "how little he knows what a coward I really am and how dreadfully I was tempted that morning to pass by."

MAN'S NEED OF GOD

If there's an impression on my mind which I may regard as stronger than any other, it is a deep and immovable conviction that the Catholic religion is the one great power in this world which has stability and permanence and which can make life worth living.

And in saying this I am not merely speaking from the standpoint of the convinced Catholic who believes in the divine origin of the Church, but from that of the student of human nature and character and of non-Catholic institutions and systems in many lands. It is a conviction, in fact, which would, I think, have been forced upon me by reflection and observation even if the happiness of embracing the Catholic faith had not been mine. I find it difficult to understand how any man who has thought matters out, and who will not allow his judgment to be affected by side issues, can escape a similar conviction. I have a suspicion sometimes that the better minds everywhere are beginning vaguely to realize the fact, and that this may in some measure account for the commanding position which the Catholic Church is increasingly occupying in human thought.

I will briefly state upon what facts and principles I believe my own deep conviction to have been formed. I am, in the first place, wholly convinced that every man of rightly adjusted mind knows that God exists and that he has need of Him. Philosophy and speculation and science are quite another. The first may and do sometimes become intellectual playthings. The latter is a stern reality and cannot safely be played with. It cannot be ignored or escaped without throwing the entire moral or mental constitution out of gear. The man who is trying to play tricks with this fundamental conviction created by the most simple processes of thought is a restless and dissatisfied man wherever you may meet him. He takes a crooked and perverted view of life, and that view has a pessimistic coloring. Occasionally, it is true, one meets the man who affects a jaunty kind of optimism, a half-hearted sort of admiration for things as they are, and who loudly denounces the folly of inquiring into the whence and the whither at all; but he is generally very conscious that it is but the clinging of a drowning man to a straw—that his philosophy is bound to fail him sooner or later. There is one characteristic, however, which always and everywhere distinguishes these types of men, whether you meet them in ordinary social life, on a long sea voyage, or on a railway journey. They will take the first opportunity of introducing the subject of religion and if they find you responsive and giving evidence that you, too, are interested and have thought about the matter, they will talk about it exhaustively and incessantly. But the eagerness displayed is suspicious, for it is mostly wholly out of proportion to what one would suppose to be the needs of the case. I have so often, in the course of my extensive travels both by sea and land, observed this strange phenomenon and have reflected deeply upon it. I have asked myself: why this keen interest in religion when so many and such urgent mundane matters are engaging the attention? Why discussion of a subject so emphatically declared to be settled and upon which all rational men are supposed to be agreed? There is, I am convinced, but one answer to this question. The mind, disloyal to its deepest conviction, is really miserable and ill at ease. It is not quite sure of the tenableness of its philosophy. Somehow life, in the light of that philosophy, bears a depressing and gloomy aspect. Daily recurring convictions have to be faced and repressed. And, as a consequence, the oppressed mind seeks to communicate itself. It craves for fellowship. It looks for confirmation of its adopted philosophy; for assurance that it is really sound and tenable and—safe.

The mind has somehow become vaguely and partially convinced; but there is the conscience to be reckoned with and somehow it refuses to be comforted. It will incessantly clamor for new arguments that may go to assure it and that may bring peace and satisfaction. It is irritated when it finds that the arguments advanced do not impress another's mind—that there is another and very different aspect of the matter.

I have spoken to many priests and clergymen on this subject and in many lands, and those of them who have seen the world and who know life have invariably confirmed the correctness of my impressions. In America especially, where men are so much less reserved than they are in our European countries, a man wearing a clerical collar, is almost always a marked man. He may go out of his way to seek retirement, sometimes in the remotest and most hidden part of a smoking-room; fellow-travelers will spy him out; they will take a seat near him; they will draw him into conversation and after a very little while that conversation will turn on religion—the subject of God, the human soul and the aim and purpose of human life.

It is, to my mind, from these simple facts and occurrences in life that we learn better and truer lessons than we are likely to learn from books. They show us what man really is—not what he is supposed or assumed to be by some scientists and philosophers, who study him in theory or who are bent upon fitting him into some preconceived system.

Man knows, through the simplest and most ordinary processes of thought, that God exists and that he cannot escape Him. He knows that he stands in some kind of personal relation to Him and that no human agency could have created in his mind convictions and impressions which no single hostile influence in life is sufficient to extinguish and to efface.

And he further knows that he needs God. He has the vaguely realized conviction that this consciousness is capable of the most far-reaching development that the true end and purpose of life are to be found. He knows that its repression means a stunted and mutilated life, an existence without aim and meaning and a constant sense of soul-weariness and disappointment.

I am proudly convinced that this is a correct view of the matter and that no scientific assertion or philosophic assumption can touch this deep consciousness of the soul that God, the personal Creator and life-giver, exists and that man, in every condition of life and degree of culture and development, has need of Him. Where would religion be today if this were not so, if the fleshly cravings of men, if worldly achievements and distinctions could wholly efface and destroy it?

"A conception of God," says Professor Max Mueller, "a feeling of human weakness, and dependence, a belief in the divine government of the world, the distinction between good and evil and the hope of a better life—these are some of the fundamental elements of all religions. Even though submerged for a time, they again and again rise to the surface. Even though frequently distorted they again and again strive after a more perfect development. Had they not been original attributes of the human soul, religion would have remained an impossibility and the tongues of angels would have been for human ears but sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

Now, it is certain that the Catholic Church alone teaches the existence of a personal God, and of man's per-

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sonal relation to Him, with uncompromising and unerring distinctness and certainty.

I do not mean by this that other systems of Christian or even non-Christian thought do not profess the same belief. But experience is constantly proving that in these systems modifications of this teaching are both possible and permissible. There is with them no fixity or finality—no clear and universal recognition that this truth is an elementary and fundamental one respecting which there can be no possible doubt. Pantheistic, monistic and even spiritualistic conceptions and speculations are avowedly and tentatively entertained and admitted and are allowed to veil or over shadow the fundamental truth. We have, in this sphere, the development of new theories, new modes of conceiving of the nature of God and of His relation to the world, and these theories and conceptions, are often claimed to be higher standpoints, departures from what is boldly pronounced to represent primitive and anthropomorphic notions of things.

And since there is, in these systems, no dogmatic authority, no living voice distinguishing truth from error and binding the conscience, the most grotesque conceptions and theories are possible and conceivable, and it is difficult to say what form the teaching respecting God and His relation to the world may not assume in the future.

But the effect of this upon the human mind is not what is so often claimed for it, i. e., a higher kind of mental and moral development, but it is doubt, uncertainty and moral instability. It is reserve and paralysis in the sphere of the distinctly spiritual life. The debating soul waits for further lights and disclosures, and meanwhile stifles its fundamental convictions and its needs. But a definitely spiritual development is incompatible with fundamental doubt. A sensible man does not surrender the joys of life, its successes and achievements, to some deity respecting which he cannot form a clear and intelligent conception, which may know and care little about him and which may in the end turn out to be some possibly unbecomingly world-force. I ask my readers to look at the reviews of some of our modern theological and philosophical works for a confirmation of what I am saying. It is clear that in this sphere anything and everything is possible outside the Catholic Church.

But since, as I maintain, the conviction of the existence of a personal God and of a personal need of Him is natural and fundamental with man, and since man cannot successfully and profitably for any length of time escape and efface this conviction, that institution is ultimately bound to secure his allegiance in a clear and intelligent and emphatically teaches and proclaims this truth and which allows respecting it no kind of hesitation or compromise or modification.

It is to the Catholic Church and to her fixed and unhesitating teaching that both the normal man and the man who, after many excursions into the fields of error, has become true to himself, must ultimately turn.—J. Godfrey Raupert in the Liguorian.

AN UNWELCOME TRUTH

The late James R. Randall used to tell of a Protestant acquaintance of his to whom he lent a copy of Father Smauer's book called "Points of Controversy," that the man brought it back to him and said:

"I read about half of it. I'm afraid to read any more. If I did, and the second part is as convincing as the first part, I'd have become a Catholic. I don't want to be a Catholic. I don't want to be convinced that the Catholic Church is right. So I won't read any more of that book."

That is the attitude of a good many non-Catholics. Having been brought up from childhood to hate the Catholic Church and to believe that it is a vile, low-down, ignorant, superstitious, evil organization, hostile to liberty, to progress, to enlightenment, to popular education, to human rights, to the Bible, to pure religion, and to the Gospel of Christ, they don't want to hear about it. History, so they have been told, proves it to be all that the Reformers and their followers have said of it. So what's the use of giving it a hearing?

When, however, the facts and the arguments that it presents in vindication of its authority as the Church established by Christ, are laid before them; when the evidence of its beneficent career is submitted for their consideration; when the proofs of its holiness are accumulated; when it shows that its doctrines are Scriptural and logical; when, in a word, it proves its case, some 40,000 of them become converted to it every year, but the others deliberately close their eyes to the light. The truth that the Catholic Church is the one true Church of Christ, the only Church of Christ, is not welcome to them. It is not wanted. It is an offensive, irritating, troublesome, exasperating truth. It is hard to get rid of, an annoying, persistent, bothersome truth; but, to the best of their ability, in spite of their conscience, in spite of their intellect, in spite of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, they will reject that truth.—Catholic Columbian.



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