

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE APOSTOLATE OF GOOD EXAMPLE

"At that time, when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, sending two of his disciples, he said to Him: Art thou He that art to come, or look we for another?" (Matt. xi, 2, 3.)

How strangely these words sound! St. John, who was to go before Our Lord Jesus Christ and announce His coming, apparently was not convinced that Christ was the true Redeemer. However, such was not the case. St. John knew well who Christ was. He sent the two disciples to Him not to quiet himself in any doubt, for he had none, but to satisfy these disciples and their brethren, and to convince them that Christ was really the Messiah—the promised Redeemer. Christ, in His divine wisdom, understood this mission of the disciples, and gave them the proofs that He knew would convince them. Had He only asserted that He was really the Christ, they perhaps would have returned with doubt yet in their minds. He had recourse to facts—to the great works that He had performed, and would continue to perform. These they could neither deny nor doubt, for they were open to their eyes.

There is a great example contained in this fact for the people of the world today to imitate. How many doubting individuals we find everywhere! They are, at least many of them, not to be condemned because they are not willing to remain in doubt; and, should the way that would rid them of uncertainty be pointed out to them, they would quickly enter upon it. Many souls today are groping in the dark who would soon be followers of the light were it made known to them in the proper way.

It is the duty of Catholics to point out the way to salvation to their doubting neighbors, both by word and by example. We have the means, and it always can be made known to him who yearns for it. This is within the power of all good Catholics. To the ordinary lay person, as well as to the apostle and minister of Christ, these words were addressed: "You are the salt of the earth," and "you are the light of the world." But how are Catholics to perform this duty? It is to be done by their good, exemplary lives; by their kind word of persuasion; and by their knowledge, which they may communicate to others, of the great truths of their Church.

The life of a good Christian is a power. Why? Because it is a truth. If you are good, you will be true to God and to your neighbor. Who will notice this good life you lead and not look for the reasons that urge you on? Your neighbors will realize that there must be something of great weight and truth causing you to lead a good life, and naturally they will be impelled to seek for this cause. Will this search be successful? It will be in every instance. The fact of your good and conscientious life will be a truth more convincing to them than thousands of words from learned orators and zealous expounders of the faith. Christ, in answer to the question of the two disciples of John, pointed to the works that He had performed. This alone convinced them.

The doubting mind is generally susceptible to truthful impressions, and the man who is heavy in honest faith will receive them. The good Catholic can direct him to the source at which he may receive the instruction he desires. This can be done by persuasion. It is evident that the man in doubt needs persuasion. God wishes all to have certainty in religion—a certainty in vision and a certainty in faith. Both reason and faith are among the elements that constitute a religious man. Your belief is reasonable if this you generally can persuade others—if you possess the knowledge of your religion that you should. If your hearers are in earnest, God will infuse into their hearts the faith that is necessary to believe the truths that are above reason. Thus they will arrive at certainty in religious belief.

Lastly, by a mere enumeration of the great facts in the Church, the good Christian can help to bring a doubting man—speaking always of a man in honest doubt—to the truth. Every word that Christ predicted about the Church is being verified. She alone has withstood the rage of the enemy prepared to corrupt her if possible, and has fought, courageously and successfully, any innovations in God's law or doctrine. For her truths—abstract as many may be—men have sacrificed everything, even life itself. To her invitation thousands have responded, left behind all worldly hopes, and sacrificed their lives for her cause. The poor, the sick, and the aged are being cared for by her. These, and thousands of other great facts regarding the Catholic Church, may be cited to the man who is in doubt about the truth in religion. All are truths that his mind must accept.

Outside the true fold today are many who would be in it, had they seen good example in their Catholic acquaintances, and had the truths of the Church been pointed out to them. Strive by word and work to bring about an increase in the number of the members of the one true Church. Opportunities always will be offered you, for there are many who are as earnestly searching for proofs of the true religion as were the two disciples, of whom we read above, searching for the true Christ. May Catholics make these proofs known to the world so that Christ's words: "There shall be one fold and one shepherd," may become realized more and more.

GENERAL INTENTION FOR DECEMBER

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.

CHRISTIAN MORTIFICATION

If mortification has a dismal and unpleasant sound, its significance is harsh and repellent; for, in its primary sense, it means putting to death, and death is a thing that even the poor, creeping, crawling worm of the earth wards off with all its puny might. Mortification, points to death. Christian mortification, however, rising on the wings of faith to clearer vision, fixes her hopes and aspires to, not the death of this body of ours, for such a death it shares with the lowest form of animal life, but rather the death of those feelings, impulses, and passions which may hinder or possibly halt the progress of the soul in her course heavenward towards the love of God above all things.

The word is hard. Its spiritual meaning is replete with comfort, life, strength. Buoyed up by God's promise, vivified by God's grace, strengthened by God's encouraging "Well done, good and faithful servant," the soul, like another St. George, heroically and steadfastly gives battle for the sake of a life near what God lover, far from what God views with dislike, disfavor, or loathing.

As a member of the human family, one ought to live according to reason. Indeed, oftentimes the last argument heard in a discussion is, "I am a reasonable man," so true is it that the reasoning faculty should, by common consent, determine one's stand in every-day affairs.

Just as of old the link-boy served a very useful purpose, yet gave way long ago to more dependable and effective means of dispelling the darkness, we may say with truth that reason is so bettered in its scope and powers by the light of faith that he who has the help of this second source of mental illumination is immeasurably in advance of those who lack it. It follows, therefore, as a matter of course, that a Catholic is to conform his life to the principles of our holy faith, inasmuch as by its light he sees more clearly and convincingly those moral truths which are partly or wholly veiled to mere reason.

To control our natural inclinations is the province of reason. In young children many things are overlooked or condoned, because of the inexperience and ignorance of their tender years; yet the devoted and conscientious mother begins to begin to impress upon her little ones those lessons of right living which they will fully grasp only after the dawn of reason and the birth of the sense of accountability. These lessons in right living regard primarily the subduing of our natural inclinations; for it belongs to reason to combat them, it is the office of grace to subdue them.

In every case of unruly or impetuous feelings, impulses, and passions, there are two, and only two, possible solutions: The first is to give the unruly element, to regret this disturbance of the peace of our little household, so to speak, and then to yield weakly by relaxing that control which reason gives; the second solution is to protect ourselves with the shield of faith, to take unto us the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, for we are invincible when we use the means that faith places within our reach.

Mortification gives light to the soul, for it drives out of the field of our spiritual vision those noxious vapors of the world which cloud the mind and force it to grope its way slowly and painfully with uncertain step towards the goal of its hopes and aspirations. Men swayed by feelings, impulse, or passion, may indeed feel exalted sentiments and readily yield to their lofty and ennobling guidance; but sustained action in the face of difficulty, disappointment and threatened defeat, imperiously demands a more reliable source of energy than a sudden burst of feeling; for hardly will there be found one so depraved and perverted as never to experience the sweet and uplifting suggestion to attempt even the heroic. The enlightened soul is steady in her work, as the pilot holds the vessel unwaveringly to her course when the sun's clear rays point out to him the treacherous shallows, the eddying maelstrom, and the cruel reef.

Sensuality on the other hand, darkens the mind, lowers one's ethical standards, and opens the way to spiritual wreck and ruin. In fact, the life of the senses, which simply means man's life without the stimulating corrective of mortification under the guidance of religion, often declares itself in some of its deest-

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able and degrading forms, as an awful consequence of disregarding the check which reason and faith combine to put upon these tendencies which man shares with the brute creation. The habitual sinner was not always thus. Little by little the guiding star of faith suffered an eclipse, a phenomenon was developed or superinduced by a cowardly or criminal yielding to the petulant querulousness of one unruly element in the heart. The forward child might have been formed and shaped into a model of courtesy, tractableness and deference.

"There is no peace for the wicked," saith the Scripture. As well seek for calm in the teeth of the gale or in the clutch of the howling blizzard as for peace in the heart that is buffeted and buffeted about by unbridled passion. Great tranquility follows the subsidence of the tempest; great spiritual peace settles down upon the heart, once mortification has gathered up the leaves of the passions and thus restrains their plunges and longes. "Much peace have they who love Thy law, O Lord."

Christian mortification regulates and subordinates all our desires and aspirations to the great and unshakable will, the blessedness of Heaven. "What hearing has this on eternity?" The answer, given in the light of Revelation, connotes the curbing, the controlling, the counterbalancing, of the myriad tendencies of the human heart in such a way as to make each and every one of them subservient to the great purpose of life, namely, salvation. Spiritual harmony is one of the precious fruits of mortification.

The life of man upon earth is a warfare. Many a great and anxious man has failed, because he did not hold in check, they make him miserable, they make his neighbor miserable. It has been well said, perhaps with more rigor than elegance, that what costs one nothing is worth precisely what one pays for it. And mortification, let us make haste to admit and even to proclaim from the housetops, surely costs. If one would view the weird splendor of the midnight sun, a wearisome journey and intense cold must come before the vision; if one would revel in the floral prodigality of the tropic jungle, a wearisome journey and intense heat will precede the gratification of his longing. Many, however, pay the price and gladly risk shortening their days for the fleeting gratification of the sense of sight or smell. But, if mortification costs, as cost it does and must, the guerdon is not a glint of solar splendor nor the whiff of floral fragrance. It is that reward exceeding great, a spiritual reward, as lasting of its own nature, as God's own blessed eternity.

"Through pain to victory." This sums up the history of human endeavor. Every great undertaking, even for the natural betterment of man, necessarily speaks of effort, exertion, toil, fatigue. The nobler the cause, the greater has been the self-sacrifice that it has been able to enlist in its support. The Way of the Cross was first made to redeem the world from the tyranny of Satan and sin.

"Through pleasure to ruin." Here we find epitomized the unfulfilling and unavoidable consequence of de-throning faith and exalting in its stead the false gods of desire, impulse and passion.

Man's dependence upon direction or guidance is seen with equal clearness in those whose lives are given over to sin and in those who devote themselves to the practice of virtue. Schools of thievery thrive just as schools of piety are sought

out and frequented. Example is the great preceptor.

Who would have picked out among the fellow students of the great Bossuet the brilliant but worldly-minded De Rancé as a reformer of monastic observance? In his soul the triumph of grace verged on the miraculous. From a pleasure-loving young man, he became a model set up by Divine grace for those who, in prayer, fasting, watching, and manual labor, continue to this day, as Trappists, to sanctify their souls and make satisfaction to the outraged Majesty of God for the sins of the world. Christian mortification has wrought these and innumerable other prodigies in the life of the Church Militant. It sanctifies and strengthens; it edifies and hastens; it points heavenward and leads the way.

HENRY J. SWIFT, S. J.

PURGATORY

The Church teaches that Purgatory is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who departing this life in God's grace are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. The Council of Trent clearly expresses the faith of the Church concerning Purgatory in the words, "The Catholic Church instructed by the Holy Ghost has from the Sacred Scriptures and the ancient traditions of the Fathers taught in Councils that there is a Purgatory, and that the souls destined therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, and especially by the acceptable sacrifices of the Altar."

Before the War many asserted that it was useless to pray for the dead. Now these same people with hearts pierced by sorrow occasioned by the loss of their dear ones, are on their knees praying for their souls. It is a need of nature, for which our Lord in His wisdom provided by the consoling doctrine of Purgatory.

The Catholic doctrine teaches that all sins are not equal before God and that some die with lesser souls for which there has been no true repentance, and also that the penalty due to sin is seldom wholly paid in this life. Since such transgressions and delinquencies do not condemn a soul to everlasting suffering, and since nothing defiled can enter Heaven there must be some intermediate state in which the dross of lighter transgressions will be burnt away. The soul thus purified enters into its glory.

The very reasons given for the existence of Purgatory make for its pleasant character. We pray and offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for these souls, that God in His mercy may have compassion on them and receive them into His bosom. How long souls must remain in the purgatorial fire has not been revealed to us. But when we consider the luxury of the present age, the small opportunity for performing acts of satisfaction offered by the conditions of modern life, and the increase in the comforts and ease of life we must conclude that since so little penance is done on earth huge arrears remain which can be sufficiently acquitted only by a long term in Purgatory.

Saint Augustine declares that the souls of the faithful departed are not separated from the Church, which is the Kingdom of Christ, and for this reason the prayers and good works of the living are helpful to the dead. Scripture and Tradition command prayers for the faithful departed, for the Council of Trent defines that the souls detained in Purgatory are aided by the suffrages of the faithful and particularly by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Hence the Saints have not hesitated to warn us that we have a real duty toward those who are still in Purgatorial expiation. The devotion to the Holy Souls which is the devotion peculiar to this month of November is consoling to humanity and eminently worthy of a religion which inspires all the purest feelings of the human heart.

"Sweet are the consolations of the dying man," says Cardinal Wiseman, "who conscious of imperfection, believes that there are others to make intercession for him when his own time for merit has expired; something to the afflicted survivors is the thought that they possess powerful means of helping their friend. In the first moments of grief this sentiment will often overcome religious prejudice, cast down the unbeliever on his knees beside the remains of his friend, and snatch from him an unconscious prayer for rest; it is an impulse of nature which for the moment aided by the analogies of revealed truth, seizes at once upon this consoling belief. But it is only a fitting and melancholy light, while the Catholic feeling, cheering though with some dimness, resembles the untailing lamp, which the piety of the ancients is said to have hung before the sepulchres of their dead."

Trivial incidents get so engrossing that life becomes unprepared for the great issues. A man gets all absorbed in his business and intends some day to enjoy his home; a woman gets engrossed in the burdensome details of life and loses her peace of mind; and one day some great overwhelming experience of trial or sorrow suddenly attacks such a life and it is simply stricken to the unforeseen assault, unprepared, because the strength which ought to have been nurtured for the crisis has been exhausted in the insignificant skirmishes of daily affairs.

We are God's own creatures, and God is our own God. All else will fail us, but He never. All is love

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