

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. M. BOSSAERT

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

WHY OUR PRAYERS OFTEN REMAIN UNANSWERED

There are many passages in Holy Scripture in which we are urged to pray, and assured that our prayers will be heard. One of them occurs in today's Gospel, which contains our divine Saviour's promise: "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you." Nevertheless, many prayers that we utter remain unanswered. Why is this? Why is not our Lord's promise always fulfilled? It cannot be God's fault, for He is faithful to what He has promised, therefore we must be to blame; and St. James tells us where we are in fault, for he says: "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss." Let us consider today what is amiss with our prayers. We are often not heard because we ask in the wrong way. There is a story of a simpleton who presented his king with a petition of such a kind as to procure for him a flogging instead of the desired favor. He had written on coarse, dirty paper and had asked for absurd and unintelligible. Now we sometimes address to God prayers that are not unlike this stupid boy's petition.

1. He wrote on coarse, dirty paper, and our prayers proceed from hearts that are impure, stained with and still attached to sin. Can we wonder if we are not heard? Are we not told in Holy Scripture that God refuses to hear sinners? As long as you make an idol of sin in your hearts and refuse to forsake it, you will inevitably pray in vain, for your prayers cannot be granted. No prayer can reach heaven unless it proceeds from an innocent, or at least a contrite heart; but one who prays thus obtains what he asks, for his heart can be lifted up to God and hold intercourse with Him, whereas the heart of a sinner is bound fast to his sin, and unless he can break his fetters and renounce all affection for sin he can never raise it to God, in fact, he does not understand the meaning of the words: "Lift up your heart."

2. Our prayers often fail to be answered because we do not ask right things of our great and holy God, but venture to ask what is trivial, useless and often actually harmful. Our dear Saviour Himself taught us how we ought to pray, when He said: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all these (other) things shall be added unto you." In the "Our Father" He showed us in what order we ought to lay our requests before God; this prayer contains only two petitions referring even partially to temporal matters. When we ask for our daily bread, we may think of all that we need for our earthly existence, but this is the fourth, not the first nor the only petition. In the seventh petition, when we pray to be delivered from evil, we may certainly think of earthly, temporal misfortunes, and desire to be delivered from them, if such is God's will, and expect merit for our souls; but this again is the last, and not the first petition. We like to reverse the order, and to place first what ought to be last, and last what ought to be first; if a man is worldly minded, his prayer is worldly also. It is quite right to pray for things connected with our temporal existence on earth, for temporal as well as spiritual blessings come from God; but it is not right to think more of the temporal than of the spiritual. Man in his folly often asks of God things that would be harmful to his soul, if his prayer were granted, whereas a Christian's first care, even when he prays, should be to preserve his soul from injury; for what would it profit him to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? God shows His mercy sometimes in not granting our requests, and when He does so, we ought to be grateful instead of murmuring and complaining, for He must know better than we can what is really for our good.

3. Another reason why our prayers are often not answered is that our petitions are unintelligible; that is to say, they lose all meaning because we wilfully give way to distractions and even encourage them. A man often repeats with his lips the most beautiful prayers, but his thoughts are far away; how can he expect God to hear him, when he himself hardly knows what he is saying?

Whenever you intend, therefore, to pray, act as Holy Scripture bids you, and prepare yourself that you behave not as one that tempteth God. Put aside your earthly anxieties and troubles, and still more your vain thoughts and imaginations, when you enter the house of God. Remember that you are in His holy presence, keep a watch over your senses, that they may not distract you, and then pray with all your heart to the Lord. If you pray thus with recollection, setting God and His holy will before all else; if your heart is pure or at least contrite, and if you ask what is right and good for your soul and not merely for your body, you need not be afraid; your prayer will certainly be heard by God and bring down His blessing upon you. Amen.

BEAUTY OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT

One of the great discoveries of the sixteenth century was that you can enroll a man in a religious denomination, hand him a book, and tell him to go on his way rejoicing, using his own private judgment in matters of faith and morals. Much the same would it be to enroll a class of students in medicine, hand them a medical work, and then bid them go forth, using their own private judgment in interpreting the principles to be adopted and applied in the determination and cure of disease. At any rate, that is about what the reformers did, and their disciples took them at their word. Of course, certain broad principles are accepted by all, but when there arises a particular question as to a certain line of conduct or form of belief, then private judgment asserts its reform-given rights, and the individual is allowed to face forth alone on the quest for the elusive truth.

One of the best manifestations of the utility of private judgment in the matter of religion is furnished right now by the numbers of persons in this country and abroad who have permitted themselves to be led astray by the absurdities of Spiritism. This old evil, recognized and condemned in the days of the ancient Jews, has started anew to flirt with the intelligence of modern private judgment devotees. The result, as was to be expected, has been deplorable and disheartening. Thousands of persons, following the bent of individual choice, have embraced this ridiculous, as well as blasphemous, cult in the hope of establishing communication with the souls beyond the grave.

It is in such circumstances as these that one is forced to bow to the supreme wisdom of the Catholic Church. For nineteen centuries she has studied the various efforts of mere man to foist upon his fellows error in the guise of truth. Guided by the infallible teaching committed to her, and which she cannot alter because truth is one, the Church is quick to detect fraud and to warn her children of its presence. Like the specialist in medicine, she at once diagnoses the case correctly, points out the quacks, and administers the remedies that have been found beneficial in similar cases. This is where the Catholic believer realizes what it means to him to belong to a Church that is sure of her ground, certain in her guidance and infallible in her spiritual direction.—Catholic Bulletin.

MAKING GOLDMANS AND BERKMANS

"Unadulterated bunk," that is Fair Price Commissioner McClain's pithy summary of the value attached by him to the claim that the excessive prices in the sale of clothes are due to the supposed natural law of supply and demand. Investigation by the special agents of the Department of Justice, he said, addressing the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, had disclosed a plundering of the public in comparison with which train robbery is no less respectable, but far less profitable. Men's overcoats, he stated, were selling in that city at prices 91 to 107% higher than cost to the retail dealer, with ready-made clothing 90 to 107% and women's hosiery from 100 to 150% over the original cost. Similar figures were quoted for high-grade shoes.

While such sins are laid at the door of the retail dealers, the manufacturers themselves are not growing poorer, if we may judge from the statement of Mr. Capper, in the Senate, that the profits of the American Woolen Company on an invested capital of \$22,000,000 was \$2,778,000 in 1914, \$5,100,295, in 1915, \$8,210,761 in 1916, \$15,664,985 in 1917 and \$12,324,084 in 1918 after the Federal taxes had been deducted. In fine, for the wool that went into the suit of clothes which cost the consumer \$100, the wool grower received \$7.37. Such, at least, is the testimony of the Wool Growers Association. The price paid for the finished garment would thus have been twelve times that paid for the raw material.

While quoting these figures for clothing we have fresh in mind the published statements that the New York Sheffield Farms company, which recently called on the farmers to lessen milk production, made a profit for 1918 of 51%, or three times as great as in 1917.

We are likely to remember also Senator Gronna's computation that the War has given us in round numbers, 28,000 millionaires. These figures cannot be exact, for owing to the modesty of these gentlemen it is not easy to ascertain their true number, but we do know that incomes of \$1,000,000 or more for 1919 were reported in the Chicago district alone by 781 individuals or corporations. One single corporation paid \$9,000,000 as its first installment of \$24,000,000 due the Government in income tax. The consumer, of course, ultimately pays this tax, and not the company.

It is true that the working man too is profiteering in these great and glorious days. Yet the startling wages asked in certain industries, with more startling demands held in reserve for the future, are naturally regarded as very conservative when balanced with the figures of our patriotic profiteers who would save the land from Bolshevism. It is the profiteer who has set labor the example and will continue to be the

reason for universal discontent and the cause of every form of radicalism. These are ultimately the conditions, Mr. McClain rightly says, that create ten anarchists for every Goldman and Berkman that a soviet Ark can inflict on some distant Russian port to give us a happy riddance at home. With the excessive profits, rather than with Bolshevism, should we begin our own radical work of thorough reconstruction. With the profiteer abolished we can then hope to talk reason to labor.—America.

THE CARPENTER OF NAZARETH

To the devout Catholic mind there is something peculiarly fascinating in every picture of St. Joseph. It matters little whether that picture presents him with the spotted lily in his hand or with the Virgin Child at his side—the impression is irresistible; we look up into those big, tender eyes, and we feel that he looks upon us with loving, fatherly interest.

However, to my mind, no picture can present St. Joseph truly unless it shows him in the pursuit of his daily occupation. Nazareth, the Holy Family—that is the real picture of St. Joseph; and if we would catch the real inspiration of that picture we must give it more than a passing glance. A little meditation will soon open our eyes to the fact that we have before us not so much three individual persons as rather a group, a family, a household; and in this blessed household there is one to whom even the Saviour and His Virgin Mother look up, because they have been entrusted to his care. What an atmosphere of heavenly peace and contentment breathes forth from this blessed group; and still how forcibly, too, we are reminded that their abode is not a corner of paradise. How vividly there must recur to our mind that first chapter in the history of man when God in His anger spoke the sentence, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Indeed, "the carpenter" of Nazareth is toiling in the sweat of his brow that he may fulfill God's holy will and gain sustenance for his spouse and his foster-child—the Redeemer of the World.

Such is the true picture of St. Joseph, and is it not an inspiration amid the base materialistic views of our day? Truly, it is a picture good to look upon; it is refreshing to contemplate this ideal where heaven and earth meet in blissful harmony. We can not help but feel that here is reflected the solution of the tremendous problems that confront the world today.

Thoughtful men are asking in alarm, "Whither are we drifting? What will be the outcome of this seething unrest that makes the whole world rumble like a threatening volcano?" We are told that the situation is new; we are told that the sore spot on the body of ailing humanity is Anarchy and Bolshevism, greedy Capitalism, ambitious Labor. These may be sore spots, indeed, but the root of the evil lies deeper, and it is not new. If we will pause for an unbiased analysis, we will find that we are contending with nothing less than a revival of that ancient pagan philosophy which summarizes its principles in "a minimum of work and a maximum of pleasure."

It is the same consuming malady that afflicted the world nineteen hundred years ago, when in an obscure corner of the mighty, godless Roman Empire there appeared the Saviour of the World, not as a prince of the world, but as the lowly "carpenter's son." The "carpenter" of Nazareth was, indeed, a scandal, a stumbling-block to the world, ancient and modern; and it was the "carpenter's son" yet in that humble household was laid the seed of that new Christian philosophy that rejuvenated a decadent world. Nazareth became the ideal after which were modeled those grand religious institutions that have been "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." Nazareth was the inspiration of those prosperous Christian commonwealths that gave to the world a new civilization; the ideal of Nazareth has been the salvation of society.

However, "reformers" have been at work. They have been tearing and cutting away at the teachings of Christ until today we have outside the Catholic Church only a soulless caricature parading as Christianity. False ideals have been established. As in the days of ancient paganism, riches and pleasure have again become the idols before which man created humanity eagerly worships and to which, as to a modern Moloch, he blindly feels human lives and human happiness.

But have we not drifted rather far from the picture with which we began our reflection? No farther than the world has drifted from the ideal that God has set up for our guidance. To this ideal we must return once more if we would solve the gigantic problem that confronts us. We must break away from the fallacies that are constantly flaunted before our eyes and dinned into our ears; we must leave to the philanthropic dreamer his utopia where the distinction between Capital and Labor would cease; we must look the facts in the face and grasp the truth of our Saviour's words, "The poor you have always with you."

If there is one fallacy more than another that is perverting men's minds, it is the deceitful but ever-growing popular impression that poverty is an evil in itself, that labor is merely a means to overcome

this evil, and that there is no success in life but that which eventually yields a life of ease and pleasure and luxury. Alas, are these not clearly the principles of ancient epicurean paganism, upon which the hopes of mankind were shattered long ago? Alas for the world if such principles were generally accepted. Then might we throw up our hands in despair and give up the world for lost in this modern struggle.

But, let us gratefully admit, the Christian ideal has not been entirely obliterated. The Church of Christ has been faithful to her trust and her faithful children still hearken to her voice. A despairing world turns to her as to a last recourse, and she turns to her children, saying like Pharoah of old, "Go to Joseph." She points to "the carpenter of Nazareth" as our patron and our model. Thus she accepts the challenge of today.

If this answer does not appeal to a skeptic world, it is, nevertheless, for us to show that the ideal is true. We are not blind to facts, but neither let us be blind spiritually. That poverty supplies a hard bed and a meager fare, we know; but shall we, therefore, frown upon this condition and look down upon the poor? Need we be reminded that Christ has said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and that voluntary poverty is one of the fundamentals of religious life? What mere man was ever clothed with sublimer dignity than the poor carpenter of Nazareth? Besides, though he toiled conscientiously day after day, yet he remained poor, and "the Son of Man had not where to lay His head." Measured by the world's standard of success, St. Joseph's life was a failure. Of course, we are not ready to subscribe to that verdict, because we feel that St. Joseph labored not for the acquirement of riches but for the fulfillment of a duty. That duty is also ours. Let us impress upon our minds this conception of labor. It is a duty, and there is no exemption. Whether the hand wields a shovel or a pen is but an accidental difference; the essential thing is that we work. And there can be nothing degrading in work, since He who made us made us to work. To be sure, work in itself will never appear very attractive to the physical man; the fact remains that it is an inherited punishment. But even in the cold light of reason we extol the industrious man and condemn the idle drone. How much better, then, should we appreciate our duty, when with believing hearts we can look for inspiration to our ideal of Nazareth!

Let us recall once more that blessed picture. Some artists have sought to enhance the scene by surrounding the Holy Family with a host of ministering angels. I must confess that this poetic conception does not appeal to me. Though we must assume that the angelic spirits delighted to linger in the presence of God made Man, yet that they lightened the material burden and labor of the Holy Family is not hinted at by the Evangelist and can only be called a gratuitous fancy of a pious imagination. The stern reality appears very prosaic on the surface; it is a true picture of the laborer at his daily work.

Still, we insist, the toilsome labor of St. Joseph must have been measured by the angelic spirits with the mere consideration that he was working under the very eyes of the Redeemer, for whom his every effort was expended. Most assuredly; but why should not we take the same inspiration by making his motive our own? This is precisely the solution and, therefore, we urge the necessity of turning men's minds more intently to the true ideal, "the carpenter of Nazareth."—Father Ermin, O. F. M., in St. Anthony Messenger.

A LIVELY FAITH

The Bishops' Pastoral Letter reminds us: "We would have you bear always in mind that your faith is your most precious possession and the foundation of your spiritual life."

The history of the ages discloses the Catholic Faith in many and various forms of beauty and wondrous growth. The Roman persecutions drove the followers of the Crucified into the depths of the earth; but like a precious seed their faith took root, burst through the soil, expanded into a mighty tree and shed its fragrance throughout the earth, and the children of man came and rested beneath its cooling shade.

Man's intellect rose in revolt, denied the truths of Christianity, and set up false gods. Then it was that the Church gave proof of the latent powers that challenged the forces of error; heresies were combated by the giant intellects of the Catholic Church, and the followers of man-made religions perished on the ruins of their earthly temples.

Throughout the history of the Church sterling faith, fortified by exemplarily lives, lay at the very foundations of all religious endeavor. The fury of Roman passion beat in vain against the rock of faith; the subtle wiles of heretical allurements failed after a few attempts. And yet the danger to that same faith is as great today, if not greater, than ever before.

Catholic belief is essentially opposed to the ideals of the world. The religion of Jesus Christ is founded on blood and suffering, and only through the channels of bitterness can the faithful hope to reach the haven that is the reward of fidelity through the storms of life. Today the Church is persecuted, hated and dreaded, because she de-

mands of her followers complete submission and adherence to the principles that were given forth by Christ to save the world. The world understands not the life of a Christian, and the Christian on his part is exposed to be won over to the standards of the world. Too many, alas, easily surrender the practice of their faith in the face of even slight opposition. But the Church demands an unequivocal and sturdy upholding of that faith in word and in deed on every and all occasions. The moment a Catholic begins to make distinctions as to the quality of his allegiance he loses his grip; the down-and-outward path beckons him forward, and he becomes a traitor to his conscience, a disgrace to his fellow believers, and a byword, in a spiritual sense, among the enemies of the Cross of Christ.

Truly is "your faith your most precious possession and the foundation of your spiritual life."—Catholic Bulletin.

THE ASCENSION

THURSDAY, MAY 13

The Feast of the Ascension of our Lord commemorates the passing of the visible presence of the Incarnate God from this earth, and the restoration of the glory to the Son of Man which was His before the world began. On the fortieth day after His Resurrection from the dead our Lord appeared to His disciples, "led them out as far as Bethania; and, lifting up His hands, He blessed them. He departed from them and was carried up into Heaven." The Apostles and others stood there following with straining eyes the glorious figure of our Lord until the cloud received Him out of their sight. So amazed were they at what they beheld that they remained spellbound until angels from heaven recalled them to themselves by bidding them to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, Who would invest them with power from on high that they might better perform the work that was before them.

The Ascension of the Saviour is a feast day of Heaven. It raises our thoughts to where our humanity in the person of our Lord sits at the right hand of God the Father. It tells us that there is prepared for us a place in the eternal home God has provided for all Who serve Him. "Through the cloud that received the Lord from the sight of the disciples Christian faith may penetrate, and from the contemplation of heaven's

glories and graces receive anew the strength and grace to persevere in goodness with the blessed hope before us of one day seeing Him as He is in the eternal home of glory into which He entered when the cloud received Him out of sight.—The Tablet.

THE WRITTEN WORD REMAINS

Behind the banister of the Church of St. John Lateran, there stands a statue of Leo XIII. At the base of the statue there is recorded that it is erected to the memory of the Working Man's Pope. The statue does not merit any particular attention as a work of art, and even the uniqueness of the inscription has not challenged special attention. It does not figure in the guide books of Rome. Even to visitors it did not bring a lesson of any special significance. It was probably set down to the enthusiasm of some ecclesiastic who would give credit to their Church for what the head of it had once done. After the lapse of a quarter of a century, the Pope, the statue, and the inscription may come to mean vastly more than they did twenty-five years ago. Everyone will admit that the history of the diplomacy of the Nineteenth Century cannot be written without mention of the name of Leo XIII. And everyone is more than prone to admit in the Twentieth Century that diplomacy, after all, was a very shallow and passing thing. We know now that it required something more than outstanding diplomacy to gain a place in history and infinitely more a place in the hearts of men. But the Pope who ruled in the last quarter of the XIX. century wrote an Encyclical on the "Condition of the Working Man." It was not discovered in his day, and if it was not discovered for many a day after. Its radical utterances were smothered by a neglect. Now in a newer, and, we trust a better world, this letter has come into its own, and it is about to wield influence even greater than the writer ever thought. It is becoming the basis for a new industrial battle that promises well for the liberation of the working man. To babes and infants wisdom is often revealed. The simple working man who left a token of their appreciation of their champion were merely twenty-five years ahead of their time.—New World.

Cato said the best way to keep good acts in memory was to refresh them with new.

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