

## FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. P. HICKEY, O. S. B.

## ALL SAINTS

## ETERNAL REWARD

"Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." (Matt. v. 12)

All Saints is a great and consoling festival for each of us, who believes what he learned in the Catechism as a child: "God made me to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next." Yes, it is the vision of the next world, blessed and glorious, that lifts up our souls today. We behold the multitude of those blessed ones, who in life knew, loved, and served God, and are now happy with Him for ever in their Father's home. It is not merely the festival of the great saints of God, whose names and lives we know and venerate, but of every man, woman, and child whose piety and fidelity have been rewarded with the crown of life. In humble hope and yet with loving confidence we too may count upon that reward, for God is faithful, if we now in life strive strenuously to know, love, and serve Him.

The example of the saints should encourage us, in spite of our past sins and negligences and weakness and cowardices. What they did by the grace of God we too may accomplish with the help of that same grace, which will never be wanting to us if we pray for it. True, the heroism of the martyrs, hermits, apostolic men may daunt us, but we must remember that it was by the power of God's grace they became the great saints whom we venerate. It was not the great actions and events of their lives that made them saints, but because they were so holy that they became famous.

The foundations of their holiness we read of in the gospel today. "Blessed are the poor," said our Lord, not only despising what the world could offer them, but the poor in spirit—that is, cultivating humility and the fear of God. "Blessed are the meek," those who forgive and bear no resentment. "Blessed are those that mourn," mindful of their sins and wasted opportunities. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice," putting God first in all things in their daily lives. "Blessed are the merciful," for God takes as done to Himself all kindnesses done even to the least of our brethren. "Blessed are the clean of heart," for those who refrain from all taint of evil and act with a pure intention are rewarded, "for they shall see God." "Blessed are the peacemakers," thus imitating our Lord Himself. "Blessed are they who suffer persecution," and our Saviour warned His followers that this would be their portion, for the world hates those who are not of the world, for there is the Kingdom of God. These things are the foundations of the holiness of the saints. And the more faithful in their observance, and in cultivating their spirit, the more holy they became in life, and the more blessed now, "for great is their reward in heaven."

It is on such a day as this that we realize the transforming power of God's grace. What the world makes no account of, what it might sneer at and despise, if done with a pure intention and for the love of God, is precious in His sight. Obedience, forgiveness, kindness, humility—little thought of, yet, perhaps ridiculed in this world, are the secret springs of holiness, that have raised up countless thousands to become the saints of God.

Though now secure and blessed and glorious in heaven, the saints are deeply interested in our welfare and endeavor to serve God. Their Lord and Master loves us, died for us, is offered on our altars for us, as He loved and died for them. He nourishes us, as He did them, in His tender mercy, with His own sacred Body and Blood. For His sake, then, for His glory, they are willing, ye, anxious, to help to save us by their example and their prayers.

We see why they are interested in us—because we are the redeemed of Christ. Our worth is what we are: and we are Christ's, and He ransomed us at a great price. And though we may have defiled our souls with many sins and much neglect, nevertheless we are worth the precious Blood of our Redeemer, for that has been given us. For God has so loved the souls of men! And the saints are most anxious that we should remember this, and with all earnestness should cast off by repentance all that disfigures the soul that the Almighty values so. Let us ask the saints to make us think of this, and be brave enough to attempt anything to make ourselves fit for heaven. It is all included in one word for us, by our great own English saint, the Venerable Bede. He says: "Give thyself and thou shalt have that," that is, the Kingdom of heaven. "Give thyself!" That should be the thought to make us break with sin, to cast aside anything that is not leading us to God. And then with all our soul, give ourselves in faith and hope and love to God's good service. In His mercy, He accepts ourselves with all our powers, thoughts, words, and deeds, our whole self offered to Him; and in return He gives us Himself, the light, glory, and joy of heaven: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is exceeding great in heaven."

Still I thought I must set God's command above everything.—Plato.

## MIRACLE OF BLOOD OF ST. JANUARIUS

By Canon J. P. Conroy, M. A.

On September 19, in the Cathedral at Naples, the public miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius will take place. For centuries scoffers have watched the yearly marvel without being able to explain it; chemists have made many attempts to account for it by natural means and have failed miserably.

The writer, who is neither scoffer nor doubting chemist, witnessed the miracle thirteen years ago this month and the memory of it remains vivid and distinct in detail to this day. But the purpose of this article is not to describe the miraculous manifestation at any length. That has been done many times by writers of distinction. I shall recall in a few sentences the circumstances of the Saint's death, tell in a few words what I saw, and then give some account of the tests made by scientists to discover natural causes for what is really a violation of the elementary laws of physics and plainly supernatural.

Seventeen centuries have passed since Januarius, the Bishop of Benevento, was arrested during the persecution of Diocletian. Taken before the Governor of Campania, he was sentenced to be thrown into a fiery furnace. He came forth unharmed, whereupon, with his deacon, Festus, and his lector, Desiderius, he was cast into prison at Pozzuoli, near Naples. Next day all three were given to the lions in the amphitheatre. When the beasts crouched at their feet and licked their hands, the spectators were so moved that it is related that 5,000 of them were converted to Christianity and there. But the heart of their persecutor was hardened, and he ordered all three to be beheaded on the spot. When the sentence was immediately carried out, a certain Christian woman named Eusebia recovered and gathered into phials some of the blood of the beloved bishop. This is the blood which has been the cause of much controversy for hundreds of years.

## TWO PHIALS IN RELIQUARY

It was the reliquary containing two phials which I saw taken from the treasury of the Cathedral of Naples by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and conveyed to one of the side chapels. One key to this treasury remains in the possession of the Archbishop and another is in the custody of the Mayor of Naples, and only in the presence of both may the treasury be opened. The reliquary is of silver and encloses two phials, one full of what at first appears to be a hard spongy-looking mass of reddish brown color, which tradition asserts is part of the blood gathered up by Eusebia, the other empty, but marked with stains on the inside. Charles III. took the blood from this and had it conveyed to Spain. Lest any attempt should be made to tamper with this reliquary, it is always sealed.

The procession reached the side chapel and there the litany was intoned. As the last of the responses died away in echo, one of the Canons of the Cathedral Chapter took the silver-bound phials and proceeded to the main altar railing. There, holding aloft the relic, he faced the immense congregation. A great silence fell, a silence so profound that even the clicking of beads at a distance could be distinctly heard. Minutes passed—half an hour, three quarters of an hour. Then, suddenly, I saw the sides of the brownish red mass crumble and what had been congealed became liquid. Another minute and the phial was almost filled with red blood.

## THE MOMENT OF THE MIRACLE

The miracle had taken place. A whisper passed among the 20,000 people that Naples had been again blessed by St. Januarius, protector of their city. Word was sent to the military of San Martino, and from its heights cannons boomed out over the bay and city the good tidings. The phial was then borne in procession through the Cathedral, and clergy and people chanted the Te Deum.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the experiments made by experts, it may be well to explain what is seen to take place, for the phenomena that accompany the liquefaction are each a miracle.

The sole fact of conservation," writes Professor Canave, of the University of Paris, "I see a permanent miracle. Chemists have yet to tell us how blood can be preserved in this way for 1,700 years."

The law of decomposition is evidently suspended. The phenomenon, which varies for the time in the quantity that becomes liquid, varies in the color more or less dark, and varies in the grade of liquidity, remaining inexplicable from a scientific viewpoint. Physiology teaches that the blood, once it has left the body solidifies and cannot in a natural manner return to its liquid state.

## DISPROVING SERUM SOLUTION

M. Mangin writes in his book, "The Miracle of St. Januarius Investigated by Science" (Milan 1910), that it is quite possible to cause coagulated blood to liquefy by means of serums, but that this can be done only once. "When the congealed fibrin has been broken up," he says, "it has simultaneously

become altered and a second coagulation is impossible."

The blood in the phial in passing from the solid to the liquid state presents a variation in volume, which is in open contrast to the known physical laws of liquefaction and of solidification. Before the eyes of all and within the space of a few minutes the bloody mass now increases and then diminishes, and frequently it keeps at the same level which it had when in a solid state. Neither the increase or decrease of volume is in union with the surrounding temperature.

In 1774 some of the professors of the University of Naples made a careful experiment, from which they learned that in identical conditions of temperature, phases of quite an opposite character may be observed. Investigations made in 1879 by the municipal chemist of Naples, Professor Punzo, by direction of Professor Sebastiano de Luca, Chief of the Chemists' Laboratory of the University, gave the same result. Professor de Luca, who up to that time had been quite incredulous as to the supernatural character of the phenomenon, after having studied the matter personally and with care in the light of investigations scrupulously conducted, cried out one day to Professor Punzo:

"How can it be doubted any longer. The liquefaction had taken place while de Luca himself held in his hands the phial for the purpose of studying it. So deeply was he moved that he kissed the phial with edifying respect. After this de Luca underwent a radical change of heart regarding matters religious. And he died a Christian death."

In 1902 the Asino, an anti-Christian journal published at Rome, jeered particularly at this phenomenon of the variation of the volume in the phial and said:

"It is a paradox. According to the most elementary principles of physics this (the variation) is impossible. And to convince us of this, all that is necessary is that Sperindeo (the professor who had published the result of the investigations) would weigh the phial before and after the occurrence of the liquefaction."

## A CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

The challenge was taken up. Investigations made regardless of time and patience showed a difference in weight of twenty-seven grammes and eighty-nine c. gs. between the maximum weight of the phial when full and the minimum weight when the substance had suffered the greatest reduction in volume. Two years afterward Father Silva repeated the experiment and found, prior to the reduction in volume, the same weight as did Prof. Sperindeo, and a diminution of fourteen gms. when the volume of blood had become reduced.

Among the essential characteristics of every body is the invariability of the point at which it fuses. Now the blood of St. Januarius liquefies at very different temperatures. In 1795, Fergola, professor of mathematics at Naples, observed the liquefaction take place both at a temperature of 19.8 degrees and of 26.7 degrees C.

Professor Punzo gives the data registered by the thermometer in proximity to the phial, as noted by Professor de Luca and Professor Gori in September, 1879: Sept. 25, 25 degrees C.; Sept. 27, 27 degrees C.; Sept. 19, 30 degrees C.

The physicists and the chemists are not in a position to find a single body that presents such a result as this in the phial of St. Januarius. The point of fusion in a body can, indeed, vary by means of extremely great pressure, but only by a degree or so. Whereas in this case the difference is not that of a mere fraction, which could be ascribed to error in observation or inaccuracy on the part of the thermometer, but of eleven degrees, a variation that would require a pressure of over 1,000 degrees in the atmosphere.

Therefore, all those "natural" explanations which would try to describe the liquefaction to the heat from the candles or to the temperature of the surroundings fail to explain. It is demonstrated by physiology that heat, far from causing congealed blood to become liquid, actually accelerates the congealing of blood in a liquid state.

Appropos of this, M. Mangin writes: "It is ridiculous to speak of the heat produced by kisses imprinted on the phial or that from candles." This is all the more clear in light of the fact that the blood has been found to be already in a liquid state when taken out of its niche (in the Cathedral treasury), and frequently the liquefaction has taken place when there were no lighted candles near it.

## FUNDAMENTAL DOUBT REMOVED

The fundamental doubt put forward by those who do not believe in the miracle was whether the phial contained blood at all. This doubt has been placed beyond all discussion by the spectroscopic investigations carried out by Professor Sperindeo and Professor Januarius of the Faculty of Chemistry, University of Naples. At these investigations several of the clergy and laity were present.

Professor Vincenzo Jodice, who contributed two analytical articles to the Osservatore Romano on the miracle, discusses other hypotheses which have been advanced. One of these is that the phial contains gelatine. But, as the professor points out, gelatine, which is one of those substances capable of being liquefied by heat, requires, in order to be melted, the action of a high and continuous degree of heat, which should be increased if coloring matter had been added to it. Besides when it is melted it cannot remain—as is the case with the blood in the phial—with a portion hardened amid the rest of the liquid for one whole day.

## ANSWER SOUGHT IN OCCULTISM

One of the most peculiar aspects of these endeavors to explain the miracle is that solutions almost grotesquely unscientific have been suggested by those who refuse to entertain the idea that there is any element of the supernatural in the liquefaction. One hypothesis gravely advanced, is that the blood preserves, even outside an organism a residue of life which, in consequence of the impulse received from the psycho-physical energy of the prayer of the faithful, would reawaken to fresh vitality.

The purely spiritistic hypothesis supposes that some intelligence, some spirit—maybe even that of St. Januarius—responds to the evocatory action of the faithful at prayer, or even spontaneously, and acts on a residual element of life in the blood, thereby producing liquefaction.

Still another explanation attributes the liquefaction to the action of mediums, asserts that a spirit, responding to the evocatory force of prayer, utilizes the psycho-physical power projected by those praying, and stirs up whatever residue of life remains in a lethargic state in the blood.

As the writer in the Osservatore Romano points out Professor Ambrano, Professor Canave, Professor Marino, Professor Graham, Professor D'Anna, and others, have demonstrated that the supposition of "a residue of life" existing in the martyr's blood is physiologically impossible; that lethargic survival, the so-called vampirism, is not only not proved, but is relegated to the realms of fable by the very authors who speak of it, such as Calmet, Scherz and Herenberg; that the psycho-physical power of prayer has not been proved, whilst the miracle of St. Januarius has been known to have taken place even before prayer opened; that the blood had been brought in a liquid state from its niche in the Cathedral treasury 317 times before the people had begun to pray.

Forty-six times the miracle occurred on the occasion of visits from foreigners who had come here more through a spirit of curiosity than through one of faith, and many of these were not Catholics. One example of this occurred in 1543 in the presence of Mulearsan, Bey of Tunis, a Moslem. Not infrequently, despite earnest and reiterated prayer, the liquefaction of the blood did not take place at all. And yet it may be regarded as certain that on such occasions prayer was much more intense than when the blood became instantly liquid.

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A word said at the fitting time is better than a long discourse uttered too late. Inappropriate laughter is the most inappropriate thing there is.—Cicero.

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