

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

By Rev. N. M. Redmond

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

DUTY OF PERSONS IN AUTHORITY TOWARD THOSE UNDER THEM

"And when Jesus had entered into Capernaum, there came to Him a centurion, beseeching Him, and saying: 'Lord, my servant lieth home sick with the palsy, and is grievously tormented.' (Matt. viii. 6.)

How truly admirable is the lesson taught all those in authority by the charitable solicitude of the centurion in behalf of his poor, afflicted servant! No sooner had his great faith suggested the idea of an immediate cure, than his charity forthwith led him to its execution. Though an officer of distinction, his solicitude was so great that, with a faith the most astonishing and sentiments the most humble, he besought Our Lord to heal his servant. He had a heart worthy of one in authority, and his example should be an object of imitation for all thus interested.

All of us are members of one great family, of which God is Lord and Master. According to His good pleasure, He has placed some in higher and others in lower conditions. But whether high or low, all are but servants to Him, the great and absolute Master. In our respective conditions as servants, we are responsible to Him our Master. Those whom He has placed in a higher condition and invested with authority to govern, there is no power but from God, and especially responsible to Him for their disposition toward those over whom they exercise authority. Christians in authority should never forget that they are but higher servants of the great Master of all. The golden rule of charity, "of doing to those under them as they would like to have done to themselves," were their native conditions different, should ever be observed. Such treatment will rarely fail to gain the affections of those whose duty it is to obey and insure the peace of both. Orders will be well received and generally promptly obeyed, when given in an easy and humane manner. An imperious or contemptuous air is most ill-becoming in a Christian man or woman, and seldom fails to call forth an attitude of defiance, or hatred and complaints from those toward whom it is manifested. They ever to be appreciative disposition, which makes others agreeably feel that we entertain a warm solicitude for their welfare, when the very delicate duty devolves upon us of reproof or correcting, will always prove of surpassing value to persons in authority. Meekness and self-control are admirable qualities in any one, but in those who govern, they are indispensable for the correct use of their power. Lack of consideration for human weakness, a propensity for chide and scold, are telling faults, and injustice is a crime which strongly bids for the vengeance of heaven in persons who exercise authority over others.

But by far the most important duty of those in authority, is to see that those under them fulfil their obligations to God. Neglect in this cannot be too strongly condemned. Alas, that it is so common! Oh, how many Christians seem to care not how those under them serve God! They know them to be prayerless; they see them neglect without scruple the most sacred duties of Sundays and holy-days; they are cognizant that they receive not the sacraments; and, as if it were no concern of theirs, they permit them thus to continue in the midst of their families. Aye, those there are, who consume in their own service the precious time that should be given by persons who serve them to the sacred service of God. For such negligence and injustice to both their servants and their God, they will most undoubtedly be held responsible. Nor are they in harmony with their own natural interests. Who of any experience will deny that the better the Christian, the better the servant? The more strictly religious the servant is, the more conscientious, the more faithful, the more reliable he will be. It should not, therefore, be a matter of slight moment for heads of families to see that their servants are conscientious and reliable. But they have no warrant that they will prove such in their service, when they lack conscience and fidelity in their service of God. Heads of families should not only see that their servants attend to their religious duties, but they should likewise be prompt to reprove and correct them when in word or action they offend God. Alas, the number of Christian men and women that hear and see without concern their servants insult God! What consciences they must have! How sensitive they are to every trifling offense against themselves! They even deem that all who favorably regard them, should frown on those by whom they are offended. Yet, whilst as Christians they profess to love and serve God, they permit Him to be insulted by their servants without once raising their voice to permit the dishonor. Can such conduct on the part of heads of families be calculated to bring God's blessing upon their families? Are their children, if they have any, not in danger of corruption right in the heart of their own household? A most telling way for heads of families to aim to discharge their religious duty toward those in their service, is to give them good example. In vain will they reprove and correct

them, if their own example be a constant source of disedification. Example in good or evil is a powerful teacher. Besides, example in good fails not to give honest tone and strength to all reproofs and corrections. It communicates force which sends them home to the very great betterment of those to whom they are directed. Oh, then, how strongly it devolves upon the heads of families to give good example to their servants!

These few thoughts, dear people, should have the effect to make those in authority whom they may reach, religiously examine before God, the manner in which they have been discharging their duty toward those in their employment. All should ever be conscious that, let the power which they yield be ever so great, they are themselves but servants to the great Master, God. Masters, do to your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

TEMPERANCE

THE RUNDAL DRUNKARD

In a rural community, Sunday neglect often breeds intemperance, a vice always deplored but doubly so on a day that is sacred. It taints the very neighborhood with sordid disgrace. It is no exaggeration to say that Sunday intemperance invokes divine punishment; and heavy and long is the malediction of God in answer to that appeal.

Heavy indeed is His curse. You may witness it sometimes in a life-long degradation; you may see it perchance at its life's close in the horrors of a final impotence; you may follow it even beyond life to that abandoned grave over which no consecrated hand has ever been raised; and if you would pursue it still further you must ask for greater power than nature provides; you must penetrate like Dante into the fiery depths of the Inferno. The Sunday drunkard, what an object, what a warning! You have known the man from personal contact and acquaintance. Cast your recollections back into a reminiscent mood and recall the history of that blighted, that wasted life. Time, so precious, all squandered in chances and bad habits; growth in time to be almost a second nature. He dropped away from his regular practise of going to Mass on Sunday. In the consequent ease and leisure of the long day he sought companionship; he went in just to while away the tiresome hours; the usual fellows were there recreating themselves, drinking;—no harm to sit down and listen to the village gossip, interspersed with a few broad jokes at times or maybe a friendly argument; no harm to sit down and participate in an innocent game of cards. Then too they made him so welcome, flattering his susceptible nature. They laughed at his scruples and teased and teased him until they had actually framed him into joining them in a drink. Only one; but the ice was broken; he had tasted of the knowledge of evil and the taste remained. By and by he came again; by and by he needed no pressing to come. By and by he himself became the tempter and induced others to follow him over that course of sin. The inevitable result was piteous, hapless destruction.—From "Altar Wreaths" by the Rev. Joseph Gordian Daley.

CATHOLICISM AND COURTESY

Garrett Pierce in America

Courtesy is the graceful expression of the kindly qualities of the heart. It derived a strong emphasis from Catholicism. Graciousness, considerateness, politeness, call it what you will, received new strength from our Lord. In fact, the true idea of a gentleman is to be traced to Christ. For graciousness is an outstanding quality of Jesus. Even in regard to the blossoming of interior culture and kindness, He continues to be the model of humanity. The charity of Christ, which according to St. Paul is an impelling force, inspires this trait. Charity is but coldly expressed by the English word, love; it means more than commonplace love; it means the "dearness" of Christ. In graciousness we find one of the chief secrets of the attractiveness of Christ's personality. Some, who are called saints, are harsh in manner, and wanting in affability. They keep us at a distance, and our natural tendency is to wish them at a distance. But this habitual harshness is assuredly not a result of sanctity, and, if it is found in saints it is because saints are not without slight sins and human imperfections. But it is not so in the case of the Saints of saints. Jesus is gracious with all sorts and conditions of men, with young and old, with poor and rich, with saint and sinner, with the lovable and the unlovable. He holds little children in His arms, and in this respect offers a striking contrast to the

crabbed sages of ancient times; He does not allow to pass unnoticed the mite cast into the treasury by the poor widow; His heart melts in active compassion for the multitude, who, He fears, may faint in the way. In the case of an enemy whose name has become a synonym for treachery He uses a gentle courtesy, and calls him friend; He breaks up with the dullness and incredulity of His disciples, and a gracious glance at Peter evokes a flood of genitive tears. To women, whom paganism despised as inferior creatures, He is also gracious. The adulterous woman, for whom zealots of the law thought stoning the only punishment, is told by Him to go in peace. The tentative beginnings in moral growth of a Magdalen are graciously and boldly encouraged in an adverse environment, as were the timorous advances of the unpopular and odious tax gatherer, Matthew and Zaccheus. Indeed His coming to our earth and His poor manger was an act of gracious condescension, and the close of His life on the Cross was in keeping with the beginning, for He then forgave His enemies, gave a new son to His mother, and issued a royal pardon to the crucified wail of Jewish society.

Christ's law of affectionate love, of beneficence for all men, reintroduced the virtue of gentleness to a wretched world. For tenderness and considerateness, especially as a quality of men was but little prized by the pagan world. To be just to paganism, one should admit that courtesy was not entirely unknown to pagans, for paganism had received God's good gift of reason, and could sometimes display a brilliant natural virtue. If Christianity can boast of the act of a courtier who threw his cloak on the ground to receive the footsteps of his queen, a tribe of American Indians can point to a similar courtesy when one of their men hastened to throw some grass on the mired edge of a well whence a woman was to drink. Nevertheless there is a contrast between the general spirit of paganism and that of Christianity. Ancient pagans, like Zeno, and recent pagans, like Nietzsche, made valor the be-all and end-all of individual culture. More complete is the ideal of Christianity. It adds gentleness and tenderness to manliness. We may well be thankful to find in our heroes the heart of a woman, as well as a forceful mind. Otherwise force would become brutality. The worse than pagan ideal of Nietzsche would tend to exterminate from the world the puny infant, Newton, and the unfortunate genius of Nietzsche's poor, insane self.

On account of its advocacy of gentleness some writers—for example, Lecky—have subtly misrepresented Christianity by contrasting it with paganism as the advocate of passive, womanly virtues, as against active, masculine ideals. In this he but continued the misrepresentations of the Protestant apologist Paley. As against the one-sided views of the rationalistic historian, and the Protestant apologist, the truth is that Christianity is broad enough to embrace both types of virtue, one class the complement of the other. It is shallow to exclude, with Paley, the character of great men from the domain of Christianity, presenting as it does a lengthy roll of great names. It is flying in the face of history to contrast, as Lecky does, the heroic with the saintly ideal as if the latter were not eminently heroic. Christian courtesy does not imply the languid and enervating manner of aristocratic drawing-rooms. Just as Christian courtesy stands for the courtesy of the heart as well as the courtesy of external forms, which without the former constitute an odious hypocrisy, so too it is far removed from the weakness of over-sensitive and effeminate natures. It is willing to take its chance in the rough work-a-day world, and to be hardened in its fiber by the storms of life. Like every other genuine virtue it supposes force of mind.

Some have been led by Newman's famous definition to believe that a true gentleman never gives pain. Others suppose that it is complementary to a person to say that he has no enemies. But it is necessary sometimes to give pain, and the person who has made no enemies has never struck any iniquity on the hip. Even the tender heart of St. Paul rejoiced that his rebuke saddened his converts for their own good. Let us give up, then, the idea possessed by over-sensitive natures, that a gentleman never gives pain. Christianity favors gentleness and patience, but it also favors courage and manliness, it favors in each individual, man or woman, the most complete acquisition that is possible, of the highest elements of human nature, a masculine activity and daring, and its complement, a feminine tenderness, in a word it favors gentlemanliness with all that both elements of this compound word imply. Christian women, like Joan of Arc, had a masculine courage; men saints, like Paul, had a womanly tenderness. Christ, the exemplar, was not all gentleness. Witness the severe manliness of His scourging of the money-changers, of His never-excelled invective against hypocrites of His refusal to let His disciple bury his father, on the principle of great men, that one who has set his hand to the plow must not look back, and His stern rebuke to St. Peter himself. "Go behind me, Satan, thou art a scandal to me, because thou savorest not the things that are of God." That Catholicism has been one of

the strongest factors in favoring true courtesy is made perfectly clear in its history and its theology. That wonderful poetic product of medieval times, chivalry, received the positive blessing of the Church. The Christian knight was not more remarkable for his soldierly valor and high honor than for his true courtesy. He was the chivalry sent forth with high vow to do battle for the right, and graciously to defend the weak, especially orphans and women. And the dubbing of a knight was accompanied by the set prayers of the Catholic ritual. Catholic theology, too, especially as represented by the great genius of St. Thomas, who touches on this as on nearly all subjects, makes courtesy a virtue and a duty. Courtesy is not merely a brilliant social attainment, which may be dispensed with; it is a matter of obligation. We owe it in justice to society. As society could not subsist without truth, neither could it subsist without one of the chief amenities of life, courtesy. In support of this view, St. Thomas quotes, as is his wont, a striking saying of the great philosopher of antiquity, Aristotle, that no one could remain for a single day with a sad, unpleasant man (Aristotle, 8 Ethic, ch. 5, and St. Thomas 2a, 2e, q. 114, art 2.) Consequently one is bound to live agreeably and pleasantly with others, unless for some special utility it is necessary to cause pain. Macaulay speaks of the Puritans as men with a sour aspect. In the view of Catholic theology the man with a long face and a sour aspect is doing an injustice to his fellows. In so far forth he is simply vicious. And Catholic theology is but an echo of that Divine voice which warns us, when we fast, not to look sad nor disfigure our faces.

THE CHURCH IS TO BE MAN'S TEACHER AND GUIDE

Non-Catholics hold that the Holy Scriptures read prayerfully by the individual are to be man's source of instruction and his guide in the service of God.

Now, only reflect a moment and you will quickly acknowledge that this is neither the historical nor a safe way. The people in the golden era of Christianity did not get their knowledge of religion in that way. There was no New Testament to search until Christianity had existed half a century; then there was no Bible in its present form until four centuries had elapsed, yet the whole western world was Christian. Ten millions who never saw the Bible had given up their lives for the Christian faith. Then during the next thousand years the Bible was not within reach of the people, for the simple reason that the art of printing was not invented until the year 1438.

(2) It is not a safe way in the light of present day experience—for the principle of each person "searching the Scriptures," when carried out, makes Christianity a Babel of confusion, and is the fruitful source of what it tries to overcome, viz., agnosticism, indelity and indifference.

The agnostic prefers to doubt God's existence rather than to believe Him to be the author of hundreds of contradictory sects, wrangling with each other and hating each other for love of Him. The infidel would rather believe that God made no revelation at all than to believe that the most opposite doctrines can be supported by the same divinely inspired book. The indifferentist believes that it is just as good and just as safe not to affiliate with any church as to join one which requires the minimum of belief and which may be the wrong one. When Christ said: "Search the Scriptures," He could not have meant the New Testament, for not a word of it was then written. Christ addressed those words to the doctors refer them to those passages of the Old Testament which testify to Him as the promised Messiah. Don't understand me as belittling the Bible. We believe in reading the Scriptures, but not in the private judgment theory of interpreting them, any more than you would believe in interpreting the Constitution of the United States in that way. A few examples will make my point plain: Mr. A searches the Scriptures prayerfully and discovers that there are three Persons in God; Mr. B searches the Scriptures and finds no such thing; he declares that there is but one Person in God. Mr. C by searching the Scriptures, has arrived at a firm belief in the divinity of Christ. Mr. D accuses Mr. C. of blasphemy. He sees in Jesus of Nazareth the most perfect man that ever lived, but no more than man. Mr. E pronounces the Bible to be the word of God from cover to cover, whereas Mr. F finds in it many fables and even contradictions. Mr. G learns from the Scriptures that baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation, even for infants, and Mr. H denies that it is necessary for any one, that it is no more than a mere ceremony. Mr. I finds no stress laid on baptism itself, but much stress on the manner of baptism. Mr. K warns people to be careful, for the Scriptures speak of hell or place of eternal punishment, and Mr. L declares that there is no hell at all. Mr. M finds that "faith alone" is the all in all for salvation. Mr. N says it matters little what you believe, if only you lead a moral life. Is it not plain that something is

wrong, either with the Bible or the principle of private judgment? Not the Bible, but the principle is at fault.—Our Sunday Visitor.

To have a knowledge of the Creator is incalculably a more noble thing than to have a knowledge of His creation.—Father Benson.



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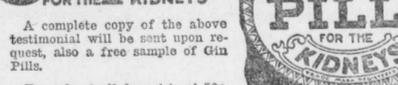


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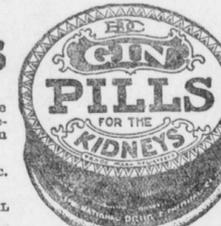
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