

FIVE-MINUTE SERMONS.

Third Sunday of Advent.

THE VICE OF SCANDAL.

And he confessed, and did not deny."

Gospel of the day.

Brethren: It is too bad that Catholic laymen do not realize the importance of the faith that is in them in the working of His Church among men. How much they can and ought to do, not only for the salvation of their fellow-Catholics, but for those outside the Church, is a fact seldom considered. Yet this is a truth: Catholic laymen by their good example, owing to the peculiar and daily opportunities thrown in their way, can bring back to the practice of faith not only negligent Catholics, but also many honest Protestants whom a priest could never reach.

Now, Catholic men, God has given you a great and precious gift when He blessed you with a divine faith, and it is a gift for which you will some day have to render an account. It is true you are not called upon to go out on the streets and proclaim before the public the faith that is in you, to boast of your Catholicity; but you are obliged to confess before all men, by your example, by the modesty of your conduct, by the purity of your speech, by your honesty in business, by your charity to the poor, by your respect and reverence for God and things holy, that you belong body and soul to a faith that teaches uprightness of life and abhors iniquity. This is the confession you are called upon to make, and this is the confession which many Catholic men in our day fail to make, and by their failure bring discredit upon the religion of Christ, disgrace upon the Church, and ruin upon their own souls.

You do not realize, brethren, your own power to influence others. See what advantages you possess. You have a faith that is unerring. You have a religion that is an infallible guide. You have principles founded on that faith which will always direct you in the right path. You have the examples of the heroic lives of the saints to encourage you, and the advice and counsel of earnest Bishops and priests to instruct and assist you. Where others are weak you are strong, strengthened with the sacramental grace, with a faith that is divine.

But the great folly with many Catholic men is this, that they fancy their only work on earth is to look out for themselves, enjoy life to the full, and then by some miracle of God's mercy scramble into heaven as best they can. Let every man take care of himself, is a false and heathen maxim, and one unworthy of a Christian to whom God has freely given the faith.

Besides this, brethren, while there are many who do not confess the faith openly and honestly, who by their want of a rightness fail to make the influence of their faith affect those about them, there is still another class who may be said to actually deny their faith. That sounds strange to your Catholic hearts, but, brethren, thank God there are few who squarely and openly deny their faith, and such a denial is usually preceded by a total rejection of nearly all the commandments.

But there are many who practically deny it, many who turn a deaf ear to the moral teaching, many to whom the faith is a problem, an hypothesis, true enough in theory but too exacting in practice. They are the Catholic men who rarely approach the sacraments; they are the Catholic men who feel no remorse at missing Mass; they are the Catholic men who make light of religious observances. The men who, when they come together, spicing the manner and the swagger of the worldly-minded, consider it a smart thing to boast of and joke about, how careless and how indifferent they are to the practices of their faith. This is particularly a mean and cowardly fault in some young men who, while believing in their hearts, converse and act as if they did not believe. Brethren, your faith is too precious a treasure to be treated lightly, and the things connected with it are too sacred not to prize it highly. Your calling as Catholic laymen demands that you should first cherish it yourselves and then make its influence felt by others.

TALKS ON RELIGION.

THE LAST SACRAMENTS.

The sacraments which Christians receive as a preparation and an aid to help them from time to time to a happy eternity, are called the last sacraments. They include the last confession, the last Communion and the last anointing before death shuts out the world from our mortal view.

"Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching." (St. Luke xii. 35). Sentinels watch in the time of warfare to raise the alarm when the enemy approaches. There is a watchman at the prow of the ships that plow the deep to signal danger ahead. Then our Lord says to us: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour." (St. Matt. xxv. 13). At our baptism when the priest placed a burning taper in one hand he admonished us: "Receive this burning light, and keep thy baptism as so to be without blame; observe the commandments of God, that, when the Lord shall come to the nuptials, thou mayest meet Him in the company of all the saints in the heavenly court, and have eternal life."

To have eternal life we must be ready when the sudden call comes. The call into eternity, though expected, is sudden. The coming of the bridegroom was expected by the foolish virgins, yet was so sudden that they had no oil for their extinguished lamps. There is no welcome for these who go beyond the grave, if they have not on the wedding garment of sanctifying grace.

We do not know the day nor the hour. David spoke truly when he said that "there is but one step between me and death." Someone else, several

whom we know are near death, but we do not realize that the hand writing on the wall is for us—that our days are numbered. How many experience the feelings of King Ezechias: "My generation is at an end, and is rolled away from me as a shepherd's tent. My life is cut off as by a weaver; whilst I was yet beginning he cast me off." (Is. xxxviii. 12).

Men who go as defendants before an earthly tribunal make special preparation for the ordeal. It is therefore evident that Christians should prepare for the judgment instituted after death by Our Lord Himself. Many daily pray, but we fear in a rather listless way: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death."

We cannot overestimate the importance of our last earthly confession. All confessions are most important, but the last is the most important of all in this time of probation and of mercy. "The night cometh when no man can labor." It is an unworthy cowardice which makes Christians who are seriously sick delay their confession. It is a sinful neglect for those who notice that the shadows are gathering not to notify the sick of their condition. The love that conspires to deceive is counterfeited, the friendship which makes people dumb at such an hour is treason—treason to an immortal soul.

The iniquity of life will then seem to be concentrated into one brief moment. The approach of death will remove many disguises and we will realize our want of sincerity, the weakness of our purposes of amendment, then we will seek to make up for our deficiencies. We will then see how little we can do of ourselves, and how much we depend upon the mercy of God and the Precious Blood of Our Lord. The last confession ought to be a link in a chain of good and sincere confessions that reach back to the dawn of reason.

A good last confession is a preparation for the reception of Our Lord in the holy Viaticum. The Lord comes to comfort and to strengthen the dying person. The priest says, as he enters with the Blessed Sacrament: "Peace be to this house and to all who dwell in it." In Bethlehem the angels sang in the presence of Our Lord, "Peace on Earth to Men of Good Will." It is to be expected that the sick person is one of good will; one who says from his heart, "Father, not my will but Thine be done." The priest in giving the Viaticum says: "Receive, brother, the Viaticum of the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep thee safe from the deadly foe, and lead thee into life everlasting."

Extreme unction is next imparted. The Catechism says: "The sacrament of extreme unction is the anointing of the sick with holy oil, accompanied with prayer." St. James says of this sacrament in verse 14, and chapter v.: "Is any one sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him."

The soul is comforted and strengthened by this sacrament. It should be received not when the good fight is nearly over, but in the beginning of the battle for heaven. Hence it should not be unnecessarily delayed. In anointing the organs of the senses, the priest says: "by this anointing and His most tender mercy, may the Lord forgive thee whatever thou hast sinned by thy sight," "hearing," etc. After the indulgence the command is given: "Go forth, O Christian soul!"

USE THE NEWSPAPERS.

The Pastoral Father Smith says that "the tallest pulpit to day is the printing press." Who can doubt it? But even if it were not the tallest it is very tall. In the United States for instance, there are a few score millions of people who are preached to from no other pulpit.

In our seminaries much time is taken up in the oratorical training of candidates for the priesthood. The results are, on the whole, satisfactory. But not so much time is put in the literary training of the seminarians. Yet it is much harder to learn to write well than to talk well.

Our priests are compelled to become talkers by the necessities of their ministry. Very few of them write for publication, because they did not receive the necessary discipline in their student days, and necessity does not step in to make literary artists of them after they begin the actual work of the ministry.

There is a feeling among priests that it is not exactly dignified to appear in the public press. But it is conceivable that St. Paul would have shrunk from newspaper publicity if it had been offered him?

Before the invention of printing men had to talk: it was the only effective way of spreading ideas. But now that we have a better way, we should make use of it.

Over in England at a recent conference of the Catholic Truth society the Rev. Dean Rothwell told of his method of using the bill board for the spread of Catholic truth. He suggested the use of colored posters, attractively printed, on which Catholic belief and practice might be set forth in simple words.—Catholic Sentinel.

Among the blessings and enjoyments of this life, there are few that can be compared to the possession of a faithful friend, who will defend you when you are unjustly assailed by the tongue of calumny, who will not forsake you when you have fallen into disgrace who will rejoice at your prosperity and grieve at your adversity, and will add to your joys and diminish your sorrows by sharing in both.

The highest sanctity is perhaps oftenest reached by utterance of pearls of wisdom nothing is heard—men who frequent no illusory realms of fancy but deposed themselves sufficiently provided for by a world of Duty and a world of Hope.—Abbey de Vere.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

The New York Sun of recent date contained a pathetic narrative of the death of an old Chinese physician, who had been baptized a Catholic forty years ago in China—but "forgot" and relapsed in paganism.

A few weeks ago word came to the Bellevue hospital that an old Chinese physician poor and far spent in consumption, lay awaiting death in his small little room at 8 Pell Street. They sent the ambulance to the house and took away the sick man, whose name was Samuel Tinlock, to the hospital.

One day, soon after he had been brought to the house wherein he was to die, the sick man's eye caught a glimpse of the black garbed priest moving from bed to bed down the long rows and bending over each sufferer to speak something into his ear. The priest was Father McCaffrey of the Carmelite church on East Twenty eighth street near First avenue.

The Chinaman raised a skinny arm and crooked a finger at the priest. Father McCaffrey came over to his bedside. He had to bend his head very low to catch what the sick man was saying.

"I want to bless myself, Father," said Tinlock. "I want you to hear me and see if it is right. I used to know how to say it many years ago."

Then the Chinaman's lips moved and there came the whispered: "In the name of the Father and of the Son"—the skinny finger strove to trace the Sign of the Cross across the forehead of the old man who lay on his back, and the final words of the blessing trailed away into a murmur.

Father McCaffrey sat down on the side of the bed and talked low to the patient. Only the sick man's eyes answered: they shone with a responsive gleam when the priest recited the prayers for the grievously afflicted and the dying.

Several days passed and Father McCaffrey came once more to the bedside of Tinlock. Again the sick man made appeal with his eyes and again his lips moved in whispered response to the prayers.

The priest would have asked the Chinaman where he learned the words of the blessing and how it was that he had become a son of the Church, but the yellow lips of the dying man could do no more than move noiselessly; the breath for speech was not in him.

Another time the priest from the Carmelite church came to the hospital, and that morning they told him that Tinlock would probably die before night. The priest hurried to the bedside of the Chinaman and prepared to give him extreme unction.

That day Tinlock made an extra effort. He spoke to the priest, telling him in halting sentences that he wished to be shrined, praying that the sacraments be given him so that he would then die in peace.

"I was one of the Church many years ago," whispered Tinlock. "It was in Canton—the good father of the Jesuit Society, he made me a Christian and my father. But I forgot—but I forgot."

Tinlock had not told it all; just for a fitting moment had he raised the shadow from the past, but the priest had seen enough to assure him that it was a baptized son of the Church that lay dying there.

Heard the confession of the Chinaman, a simple confession, made by nodding of the head to the questions put by the priest, who administered the last sacraments to the returned Christian.

For the last time Samuel Tinlock trailed his skinny finger across his breast in making the Sign of the Cross and one final blessing his lips framed. He died an hour after the priest left his bedside.—True Voice.

CARDINAL NEWMAN.

Concluding "Some Memories of Cardinal Newman" apropos of the disappearance of the old Birmingham Oratory, a contributor to the London Catholic Weekly writes:

Newman's last resting-place is at Rednal, in a little graveyard among the pine clad hills, and beside the tiny chapel of the Father's country house. A little patch of green where the wood comes to an end is dotted with simple crosses which mark the graves. At the head of one mound is a cross similar to the others, save that it bears two names, and beneath it lie the bodies of John Henry Newman and Ambrose St. John. "I wrote Newman wrote in 1876, 'with all my heart to be buried in Father Ambrose St. John's grave; and I give this as my last imperative will.' And again in 1881: 'Fais I confirm, and insist on, and command.' On his memorial tablet in the Oratory we read the words penned by himself as his epitaph: 'Ex aurbis et imaginibus in veritatem, from the shadows and symbols of earth into the fulgent personal truth that is beyond; from an earthly home into that are eternal home, of whose peace and joy these homes of ours are but dim shadows and types.'

Where will you find a friendship so disinterested as that of Jesus Christ? He comes to you, laden with gifts. He brings to you joy and interior sunshine. He brings you peace and tranquillity of heart. You come to Him, empty handed; or, if you have a gift to offer Him, it is the fruit of His bounty.—Cardinal Gibbons.

LIQUOR AND TOBACCO HABITS.

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WHY THE CHURCH IS STRICT.

NO COMPROMISE WHERE THE MARRIAGE BOND IS CONCERNED. Catholic Columbian.

Ever since January 1, 1853, when the divorce courts were established in England under Lord Palmerston, we more frequently hear the question asked, "Why should the Catholic Church be stern in her law regarding divorce?" In these days when the English and American secular press is so full of the subject and when marriage is being secularized in so many countries, it may be well to remind ourselves of what the great sacrament of matrimony is in the Christian system.

We may rest perfectly assured that if the Catholic Church is founded by the Redeemer of man there are many and good reasons for her stern laws. Not the least among them is the necessity to preserve the sacrament of matrimony itself, and consequently to assist in her own preservation. At the present day we have the advantage of nineteen hundred years of working to throw light on the science of the sacraments. That light makes clear the gladsome tidings of great joy, how in the olden time the Maker of man came on earth to teach and help his weak and erring children.

A church which had no marriage legislation would lack what we should expect from the foresight of a wise man; but a study of the Catholic sacrament of matrimony proves that the who instituted it was divine and perfectly understood the needs of His creatures. At the right moment, in the fulness of time our Saviour came on earth to set us the example of His life, to teach us the way to the happiness of heaven and to give us the grace of being born again.

By the union of a Catholic husband and wife an ark is prepared wherein the coming children of the Church are sheltered from dangers to their faith, insured Catholic surroundings and secured a reasonable certainty that they will become members of the Redeemer's household.

Protestantism, in its lax guardianship of the marriage tie has by that neglect alone proved itself not of divine origin, not imbued and penetrated with a principle of self preservation and propagation, and not zealous for the interests of Christ's creed.

Lax guardianship of the marriage tie leads to disintegration of the family and that fact alone quite justifies the stern law of the Catholic Church regarding marriage and divorce. What then is Catholic marriage? It is not merely a contract for the preservation of the home, the family and human society, but it is far more. It is a contract for the preservation of the Catholic Church. Out of that contract comes the main body of the next generation of Bishops and priests.

The Catholic Church does not, of course, depend absolutely on the sacrament of matrimony for her concrete existence, because she gains recruits by her commission to preach and consequent admission to her fold. But matrimony is one of her own internal means by which she perpetuates herself to people yet to come, and therefore the reasons for her legislation are many and of vital importance.

If the system is destined to preserve and accompany the main body of the Church throughout all time and over all lands, it must be in every way superior to all the opposing systems it will necessarily come in contact with among different nations and from diverse forms of government and religion. If it were not superior, it would soon alter in character and rapidly disappear before the influence of the marriage customs and the strength of the marriage laws it would meet with all over the face of the earth and down the centuries of time.

In the marriage contract there are difficulties sometimes met with, as there are difficulties and disadvantages in every contract for social or business purposes which can be undertaken among the race of men.

Throughout our lives there are misfortunes, troubles, accidents and sickness which will overtake us, whatever our station and whatever our occupation. The golden rule that the inevitable which cannot be cured must be endured, holds good of matrimony as well as of any thing else human. These difficulties which sometimes crop up among the parties to the marriage contract are included in the vow to take each other for what or for worse, but the Catholic knows that the sacrament gives grace and strength to bear the proper spirit such trials should they arise.

In bearing then he knows that he strengthens his own heroism and suffering not only for his family and country, but for the sake and advantage of that Church whose Founder and Builder is God.

I find that the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.—O. W. Holmes.

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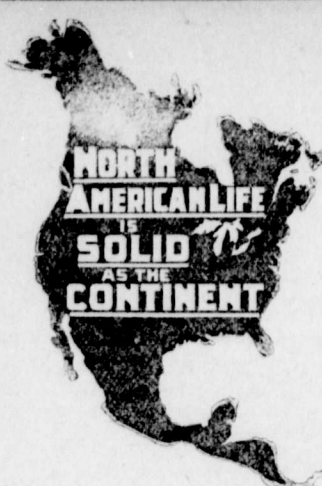
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