

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOY, D. D.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE CHURCH OUR TEACHER

"And behold, a certain lawyer stood up, tempting Him, and saying: Master, what must I do to possess eternal life?" (Luke x, 29.)

What a lesson the world might learn from this Gospel of today! And it is a lesson of which the world is sorely in need. Never, perhaps, more than at the present time, has this lesson been applicable to a great part of the human race. A young man advanced toward Our Saviour, and asked Him what he needed to do in order to possess eternal life. He was trying Our Lord. He was, no doubt, far from sincere in his question. Being instructed in the Law, he evidently thought he knew what he should do in order to save his soul. But this lawyer wished to see if Christ would answer as the law of Moses taught, or whether He would give utterance to a new doctrine, in which latter case, like the Pharisees, he would probably have found fault with Christ. However, he did what all men should do—namely, he went to Christ to learn the greatest truth that man can possess. And herein lies a lesson for us to learn—that is, to search for truth from the proper source. So, we shall not judge of the intention of the questioner; but rather, learn a great lesson from his action in asking of our Divine Saviour what was necessary in order to possess eternal life.

Certain it is that God is infinite in His intelligence, as He is infinite in all His other perfections. True it is also that we have only a very limited intelligence; so restricted is it that we can not even understand all the things with which we come in constant contact. Even the amount of intelligence our first parents possessed during the state of their innocence, though far surpassing what we have now, was very limited when compared with the intelligence of God. It is true that man has progressed in his intellect and grasps more truths now than did his forefathers, but how many truths are yet hidden from his eyes! He will progress yet more, but he will never comprehend all truths. The very laws of nature, its wealth, and its power never will be fully known to man. But need he lament this fact? No, for with the knowledge of only the most ignorant peasant, he can do the one thing necessary—save his soul.

But our ignorance is greater and still more manifest when we consider the truths of the supernatural order. The history of man clearly indicates how faint is the knowledge he has of the supernatural, even after the revelations given him by God. Man gradually lost most of the knowledge he had, and God, both in the Old and in the New Law, besides revealing new truths to him, had to suggest again old ones which man should have known from former revelations. God informs us of the existence of these truths of the supernatural order, and faith makes us believers in them. We can not learn them by study as we can acquire natural truths; nor can we experience impart them to us as it teaches us many facts of the world.

God, however, requires of us that we know these truths and accept them. But, since neither study will make them known to us nor experience teach them, it is evident that God has provided some other way by which we may come into possession of them. This way is the one indicated by the action of the lawyer in the Gospel—we must go to God and ask Him to teach us these truths. If we do not, we always shall remain ignorant of them and, besides, we shall become guilty of the gravest neglect.

It is true we cannot approach Christ, as did the lawyer mentioned in today's Gospel; but God has provided for us a substitute which speaks for Him—may, through Him. This substitute is His Church. Rather than His substitute, she is His representative—but call her what we may, His divine seal is upon her; His infallible voice is heard from her; His saving grace flows through her. From her, and from her alone, can we hear the truth; through her, and through her alone, can we be saved. Through no other source than His Church does God speak to man. All the wisdom of the world is nothing compared with the wisdom of the Church. The teachings of man count for naught, except when they are in conformity with her instructions. Nowhere else, in fact, can man learn the sublime truths that the Church is commissioned to teach.

Hence he who remains away from the Church will never know her salutary voice, will never drink at her fountains of knowledge, will never experience her saving care. Men, alas, have wandered from within her sanctuary, they have sought God elsewhere. But what have they found? View the world today, and their substitute will stand out clearly to you. Worship, if such they may be termed, have been invented—worships more pagan, or at least more human, than that of the pagans of ages long past. Today religion's highest ideal is humanitarianism. Would that there were some true Deism with it! Outside of the Church, man is worshipping man. It may not be the material man himself that he has erected as an idol, but

it is man's worldly benefit and man's earthly comfort. It is well for man to help man but it must not become a worship. Are not multitudes at the present time teaching their children only worldly knowledge? What place does religion hold in their school-rooms or in their universities? And will you say that they can, or will, learn afterwards? They certainly will not. But suppose it could be so, why neglect to teach the young the most important truths in life? Many will not listen to the voice of God, through His one representative, the Church; and the deceiver with his cunning will keep them away from God.

Catholics should never cease to praise and to thank God for their great heritage and their faith. And they should never endanger it for anything no matter how precious. Continue to listen to the voice of your Church, especially regarding the education of your children, your marital affairs, your whole belief regarding the supernatural. She will not fail you. Her hand will never grow weak, for Christ sustains it. Her voice will never grow faint, for it resounds the voice of Christ, which ever speaks clearly.

GENERAL INTENTION FOR SEPTEMBER

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI.

PRAYERS FOR RUSSIA

The present General Intention is due to the personal initiative of Pius XI. When the list of intentions for 1924 was submitted to him for his approval and blessing, there was nothing special in them touching conditions in Russia. Taking up his pen, the Holy Father drew a line over the intention which had been proposed for the month of September, and wrote: "Pray for Russia according to the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff."

Several times in past years our Apostleship has enlisted the prayerful interest of its millions of members in Russia, then an empire which comprised about one-sixth of the habitable area of the globe. The appeals were made for Christian unity, that is, the return of Russia to the true fold of Christ to which that nation once belonged and from which it had been separated for hundreds of years. But many things have happened in Russia in the past ten years, many developments have taken place, unhappily for the worse. The downfall of the imperial government, the assassination of the czar, the overwhelming famine, and, not the least, the tyranny of the Soviet regime have drawn the eyes of the world towards that populous and once powerful empire. The anti-religious struggle which has been going on in Russia since the War is perhaps the most intense that the world has known. The Roman persecutors had their gods and their pagan religions and worship; the Soviets aim at nothing less than to blot out all idea of God and religion from human hearts. It may seem incredible, but their hatred of God has gone so far as to forbid, under penalty of death, all Russians over eighteen years of age to pronounce the name of God except in derision or blasphemy. For teaching catechism to little children people have been condemned to death by the Soviet tribunals.

One would like to know how history will judge what has been taking place in Russia during the past years. Just as we shudder when recalling the horrors and excesses perpetrated during the French Revolution in the eighteenth century, and judge that nothing quite so dreadful ever happened before, it may be that this judgment will be reversed by those who come after us. A century hence, when our successors see in perspective the events that Russia is witnessing today, when they study deliberately the Soviet explosions of hatred of God and Soviet opposition to everything that men are taught to admire and venerate, they will hardly be at a loss to decide which epoch has made the greater blotch in history.

Whatever their decision may be, one bright, consoling page at least will face students of Russian history, namely that which will recall the part played by Catholics throughout the world in favor of the victims of the famine, in reply to the suggestion of the illustrious Pontiff who now occupies the throne of Peter. Famine in Russia was reaping its hundreds of thousands. The populations of entire provinces were dying of starvation, and with their hands raised to heaven praying for food, when the Pope of Rome, in the name of common humanity, sent a stirring appeal to the Catholic world. Following the example of his Divine Master, he had pity on the famishing multitude, and he asked his children all over the earth to be generous, according to their means. The response was admirable. Thirty-one million lire were gathered in at the end of the year 1923, and the golden stream still continues to flow.

Naturally, this amount was far from meeting all the needs of Russia, and the Holy Father did not expect that it should, but he endeavored to make up the deficit by the sympathy and the kindness with which he accomplished his charitable work and by the efforts

he made to raise the drooping spirits of the desolate Russian people. Those who were unable to profit by his generosity were encouraged by his words to bear their sufferings patiently; for so deep down had they sunk in their despair that for them nothing further mattered. It was a revelation to them to realize that there was someone in the world who thought of them. Encouragement given in trial is a source of spiritual strength, as we know from what happens in other spheres. Of the thousands who go to Lourdes, not all return home cured, but at the sight of the cures wrought in others the rest are strengthened in their faith and are enabled to bear with greater patience and joy the infirmities that God sends them. Thus it was with the famine-stricken in Russia. It was hardly to be expected that the Pontifical Relief Commission could alleviate all the evils or meet all the needs of that unhappy country, but what this organization accomplished left an impression which will bear fruit some day. The Commission was able to give food for months to one hundred and sixty thousand children.

And yet it labored under handicaps of many kinds. So grotesque could human aberration become that while the Papal envoys were at work feeding the starving poor of Russia, they were not allowed to mention the name of Christ or let the people whom they were serving know they were priests. The Bolsheviks, imbued with anti-Christian hatred, and the Orthodox Church element, with their anti-Catholic prejudices, were conspiring against their benefactors. The Bolsheviks saw political propaganda in these efforts to alleviate human misery; the Russian clergy, on their side, feared that the generosity of the Holy Father might turn men's hearts towards Rome. Happily the envoys advanced no higher claim to gratitude than that of common brotherhood. They forced recognition of their work by the discretion and kindness with which they exercised their functions. They nobly filled their role as representatives of the true Church of God, and were living witnesses of her spiritual rights and her transcendent charity in the face of the most repulsive materialism.

The great example of Pius XI. gave a fillip to the rest of the world. Notwithstanding the universal penury which followed in the wake of the War, nations began to think further than their own frontiers and to pour supplies into Russia. The poor, famine-stricken people of that country were thankful to the Holy Father, for they realized who was the prime mover in the great world-wave of charity which helped to save them from death by starvation. Messages inspired by the most profound gratitude were sent to the Vatican, testifying in no uncertain terms to what the writers felt. Many of the Orthodox Russian clergy, usually so hostile to Catholicism, were conquered by the thoughtfulness of Pius XI. "I send my sincere thanks to His Holiness Pius XI," wrote one of them, "for the great help he has given to the Russian nation in these times of famine and misery." "May your venerable name and your work be blessed for all generations to come," wrote another. "They will not be forgotten by the Russian clergy, suffering and humiliated, as they are, in these latter days."

In all truth, the Holy Father succeeded in what he aimed at accomplishing. This was neither religious propaganda, nor the elimination of sickness or death or tyranny from Russia; his aim was merely to make less intolerable the burden Russia had to bear. It was to revive hope in their hearts and, above all, trust in the kindness of him who represents on earth the Father in Heaven.

Who knows what may come from this great act of the Sovereign Pontiff? Persecution purifies the soul, and it is possible that we have here a guarantee of a future moral and religious revival in Russia. Russian writers have more than once admitted drawbacks in their religious system, and both clergy and people, long before the cataclysm arrived, called for a renewal of spiritual life and a restoration of canonical conditions in their church. Since the downfall of czarism this movement towards loftier ideals has gone on. Many of the Orthodox clergy, persecuted for the name of Christ as the Catholic clergy were, have shown truly Christian heroism in suffering. This union in suffering ought surely to enkindle in Russian souls a desire for unity as it is understood in the Catholic Church, a unity which draws all nations together in the same service of God and with the same fraternal docility to His Vicar on earth.

There are still many national prejudices to be overcome, but these are not insurmountable, and a solution may soon be found. The Oriental Institute in Rome is trying to multiply a clergy that will meet the peculiar needs of Russia, not so much a clergy of the missionary type as one scientifically trained who will be able to treat all religious questions cropping up in the Slavonic world, and especially discuss with competency reunion of Russian Orthodoxy with Rome.

The work is worth the effort, for the harvest is great. Before the War Russia was peopled by a hundred

and eighty millions of souls. In the whole empire, outside the Polish provinces, the Catholic Church had only two dioceses, one of them extending from Mobeft to the Sea of Japan, the other embracing all the Black Sea provinces watered by the Volga. To complete a desolate picture, the Bishops were expelled from these two dioceses and it is questioned whether, at the present time, twenty priests can be found outside of prisons in all Russian territory.

The noble charity of Pope Pius XI. has opened up the way to action; we now know what his intentions are regarding Russia, and why he asks for our prayers. In view of the spiritual interests that are at stake, he is aware that prayer is far more necessary than mere material help. Our prayers and our charity must drive out of the land of martyrs the prejudices of those who distrust Rome and look upon her as the enemy of the Russians. God keeps many secrets locked in His bosom and we know not His designs, but a day will undoubtedly come when the voice of His Pontiff will be heard and understood even in Russia. It is for us meanwhile to do our share to hasten that day. If we are possessed of the truly apostolic spirit which animates the Vicar of Christ, we shall ask God to cast a pitying look on Russia, and by His all powerful arm help on its material and spiritual advancement.

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

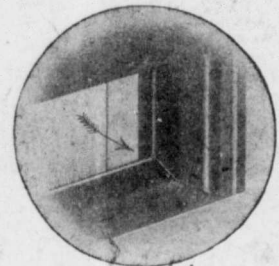
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