

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

By Rev. M. Bossart

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

GOD IS LOVE AND DESIRES NOTHING BUT LOVE

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." These two commandments are the essence and sum of the contents of the law and the prophets. According to our Lord's teaching in today's gospel all religion consists in genuine, childlike love of God, our Father, and brotherly love of all men, as being children of the same heavenly Father. In fact, God is love, and desires nothing but love.

1. God is love, all the doctrines of Christianity proclaim this fact; He is love, and for this reason He created the world and peopled it with human beings, giving them immortal souls, equipping them with many glorious privileges and powers and destining them for eternal happiness. God is love, and His love caused Him to give us the commandments as our guide on the way to heaven, and to send His holy angels to be our companions and protectors along our difficult path. Even the numerous afflictions with which God chastises the wicked and tries the righteous—even hell, created to deter men from evil by the prospect of terrible punishment—proclaim to us God's love.

2. God is love, and therefore He had mercy upon our fallen race, and sent His only-begotten Son to seek and to save that which was lost. All Christ's life on earth, all His actions and sufferings, and especially His death on the Cross, teach us the same lesson: God is love! We learn it again from the holy Sacraments, those precious sources of grace that supply strength to the weak and weary traveller on his journey through life—especially from the holy Sacrament of Penance, in which God so tenderly welcomes the penitent sinner, and still more from the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, where Jesus gives Himself to be our food. We learn it also from the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, when in an unbloody manner our Lord Himself renews His death on the Cross, and offers Himself daily, as once on the Cross, to make atonement to His heavenly Father for the sins of men. We might survey all the doctrines and institutions of Christianity, and everywhere we should find them to be proofs and manifestations of God's love.

3. But God, being love, desires love. All the teaching of Christianity on this subject of morals may be summed up shortly thus: "Love God with thy whole heart, and love thy neighbor as thyself."

Whoever loves God with his whole heart is doing all his duty to his Lord and Master. He delights in thinking of God, and does his best to live so as to please Him. He thinks, speaks and acts only in accordance with the will of God. He obeys those in authority, because it is God's will; he keeps grand in his heart, encourages his household to do right, trains his children in the fear of the Lord, and watches over his subordinate, that they may not stray from the straight path. He assists devoutly at public worship, because God desires us to pray together and to edify one another. A man who truly loves God, bears with patience whatever suffering God sees fit to send him, knowing well that God can do no wrong; his confidence in Him is firm as a rock, and never wavers. In short, whoever truly loves God is careful to avoid all that might displease his heavenly Father, even in the least degree, and says, like Joseph the patriarch, "How could I do evil in the sight of my God?"

Yet God's commandment of charity is fulfilled perfectly only by one who at the same time loves his neighbor as himself, for thus he discharges all his duties towards his fellow man. He who loves his neighbor as himself allows no angry or revengeful thoughts to rise up in his heart; he hates no one, and never returns evil for evil; he grieves over the sin committed by one who injures him, far more than over the wrong that he suffers. He is unjust to no one, but gives to each his due, treating others as he would wish to be treated by them. He never begrudges another his good fortune, and rejoices not in the losses and failures of others, but shares their happiness when they are prosperous, and their sorrows when they are in trouble.

He who loves his neighbor as himself always thinks and speaks well of others, for he would wish them to think and speak well of him. He never talks scandal, nor does he repeat any evil that he may have heard, but does his best to conceal his neighbor's faults and to put the best interpretation upon their actions. He who loves his neighbor as himself exerts himself to do all the good that lies in his power, and to help others to the utmost of his ability. He is particularly zealous for the salvation of souls, desiring all to be good and happy. Hence he warns those who go astray, he instructs the ignorant, sets a good example to everyone, and prays that all men may be saved.

The man, therefore, who truly loves God does all these things. Let us, too, always strive to act thus, and then we shall be able truthfully to assert that we love God, and do our duty perfectly to our fellowmen, and then we may venture to hope that God will some day take us to Himself in His grace and love. Amen.

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GENERAL INTENTION FOR OCTOBER

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.

THE RECRUITING OF CATECHISTS

Although every age of the Church has its peculiar difficulties and dangers, which have to be faced and overcome by means of spiritual arms, it seems to the thoughtful observer that the dangers of today outweigh those of any preceding age and call for entirely exceptional alertness and activity on the part of the watchmen of Israel.

If there was formerly looseness of morals to be lamented and combated, it was called looseness of morals, whereas the modern tendency is to dignify a very hateful thing with a respectable name and to indulge in evil, while calling it, if not good, at least endurable. What was once bewailed as decay of religious spirit is now dubbed by many 'broad-mindedness' and tolerance. Restiveness under authority, whether civil or parental, used to be viewed as a mark of waywardness deserving reprobation, whereas in these latter days it is not seldom very mistakenly looked upon as commendable self-assertiveness. Add to all these disturbing elements the unsettled state of public affairs and one is bound to see with many misgivings that a deadly blow is aimed at parental control, at public authority, and at the very foundations of religious faith and practice.

The greatest safeguard of the body politic is religious instruction, especially that received at the knee of a devoted and self-sacrificing mother; but changes, almost radical in their nature, have made such mother's right sparse, with consequent injury to family piety and to the spirit of religion in general.

How to supply what is wanting? The young must have a teacher; that teacher must have a certain fitness for the work, must have prudence and perseverance, and must follow some system. The catechist needs time for the work, must secure the attention of the children, must maintain order if the children's attention is to be held, and must repeat and repeat until the lesson has been grasped. Who is the catechist? Whence to be summoned? How to be attracted to the work? How to be endowed with the blessed quality of constancy?

Where our religious are in charge of primary and grammar school education we are mercifully delivered from all concern about duly qualified catechists, since it is a part of their vocation to train their little charges in the way of God's commandments and counsels. The question, therefore, is how to secure those who, although in the world, possess in no small degree the zeal, the love for souls, and the devotedness of those who have been called to the religious life.

Our opinion is, in the first place, that girls, or 'youngish' young ladies seldom show the requisite qualities; for, whatever else they possess, they are very often lacking in constancy. Social attractions, for example, may be suffered to outweigh their zeal for regularity in teaching the catechism. To illustrate by an example: In a certain parish where the catechism was taught by four young misses, all four failed to put in an appearance on a particular Sunday, though not one of the four was ill, and thus the whole catechism class was badly demoralized. Similar reasons militate against building our hopes on 'youngish' young men.

Without stopping to rule out all uncertain or unreliable classes of prospective catechists, we may say off-hand that the most promising and most fruitful source from which to expect candidates for the apostolic work of teaching the catechism would be the teaching profession; for it offers educated and enlightened men and women who have embraced a laborious and trying lifework which gives them a knowledge of children, and for that reason, if for no other, ought to develop in them a sympathetic love for their young charges and an intelligent zeal for promoting their welfare. To the writer's personal knowledge, such devoted friends of children have been found and utilized in the United States where confessional schools are the exception and so-called public 'non-sectarian' schools are the common rule. After

having coped with the difficulties which are bound to crop out in a class of fifty or more youngsters, these teachers have remained after school hours and have taught their children the catechism or have accompanied them to some nearby church and have there supplemented their classroom work by imparting the Christian doctrine to children who otherwise might never know enough about their holy religion to respect it, not to speak of living up to the spirit of its laws.

Where Catholic teachers are not available, there is hardly a parish that cannot point with pride and thankfulness to two or more ladies, with few domestic calls upon their time and strength, who are ready for any good work that the pastor may recommend to them; and surely 'instructing others to justice' is not only a good work but is even one of the most commendable of good works. Nobody, we take it, will fail to recall the golden counsel of the late Pope Pius X, of holy memory, who, when asked by a committee of ladies how they might employ themselves in the cause of the Church, promptly answered, "Teach the catechism." That illustrious Pontiff who had risen from the post of assistant in an unimportant parish to the exalted dignity of the Papedom, knew from personal experience with the young and ignorant the vital importance of training their early steps in the way of God's commandments.

L'union fait la force, the great seal of heroic Belgium tells us. It is this union of effort which must make a success of catechizing, and this union to be successful, demands some kind of organization, either as a distinct parish society or as a distinct department of a parish society, under the general direction of the pastor. This is requisite if the number of the pupils is at all considerable.

We know of a city parish covering a relatively large area in which the zealous and untiring pastor has established a dozen centers where the catechism is taught on certain appointed week days; and he keeps up the interest of both catechists and children by frequent visits which are never of a perfunctory character. His parishioners are generally speaking, poor, unlettered working people, with no leisure for properly instructing their children. Young women engaged in home duties are the pastor's main dependence for catechists.

A similar course ought to be followed when the parish includes a number of outlying missions and stations which are visited at more or less frequent intervals; for if in a closely built up parish the need of a catechetical instruction is very great, it is greater by far in the missions where the allurements of non-Catholic religious services, social, 'pound parties,' Christmas trees, and the like, are an ever-present danger to the faith and to the practice of the faith.

For our part we are in favor of a distinct organization with its medals or badges; we think it should be one of the most esteemed of parish societies and that its members should have their days for religious celebrations as well as for social relaxation, with a picnic or a dinner. In all these details distinctiveness and not empty show should be the aim. There should be, moreover, an annual outing for all the catechists and all the children. The outing has many advantages for all concerned. Among such advantages may be mentioned the esprit de corps which is thereby fostered and strengthened and the encouragement given to the individual catechists and pupils alike.

After all has been said and done, the one prime factor to be kept in view at all times, is constancy or perseverance on the part of catechists and children. A personal inspection of the catechism class or classes will be stimulating the catechists to continued effort and of inducing the little ones to be prompt and regular in their attendance at what ought to be impressed upon them as a class of vast importance and far reaching consequences.

"Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price" of an efficient catechist; for he truly co-operates in saving souls. To be invited to act as a catechist is to be afforded an opportunity to carry on the very work which brought our Divine Lord from

the bosom of His Eternal Father, namely, to train man's vision for Heaven and to guide man's feet toward the realization and fulfillment of that petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come."

—HENRY J. SWIFT, S. J.

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