

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. J. J. BURKE

THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION

THE BAPTISM

"His name was called Jesus." (Luke II, 21)

My dear friends, our Divine Saviour received His Holy Name on the feast of the Circumcision. That name is the holiest of all names, because it was chosen by God Himself, because it is the name of the holiest of beings and because it means Saviour. "There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we may be saved."

Since the name of Jesus is so holy, we should honor it at all times by our words and by our actions. We should never dare to take the holy name in vain, to curse to swear, or blaspheme.

God has given us a tongue—the use of speech that we may give Him glory, and praise His holy name. How ungrateful we are, then, when we turn this gift against Him.

I have even seen infants, — I shudder to think of it, — I have seen them when scarcely able to lip a name, taught by the father to take God's name in vain instead of to bless His name and pray to Him. Then the admiring parent would sit back and laugh at what he considered manly in his little hero. It is no wonder that in such persons the habit grows and spreads untold evil and that God is sorely dishonored, insulted and outraged.

That tongue given to bless God is turned to curse man who is made after the likeness of God. Far better would it be not to be able to speak, than to be able to restrain the tongue from cursing. It will not do to say "I did not mean it: I would not for the world wish such an evil to befall any human being, I was in a passion." For there is a fault somewhere. You have reason and you have prayer as a means of grace. With reason and prayer you can control your passion and restrain your tongue. Swearing is as common as cursing. Whenever the name of God, of heaven, of the soul or any of the nobler works of Creation is used with "by" or "upon" it is swearing; and even the common use of God's holy name is a sin, for, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that shall take the name of the Lord his God in vain."

If you were in prison bound by chains which you could not sever, and some kind and generous benefactor would come along and deliver you from prison, loose your chains, or even give his life to free you, would you not be the lowest, the meanest of mankind to talk badly, insultingly of such a person or listen while others insult him?

Our Saviour is this kind and generous benefactor. He freed us from the chains of sin. He gave His life for us and how do we repay Him? By cursing, by swearing, by taking his name in vain, by insulting Him, by our blasphemous language?

See, then, if you have contracted such a habit. If so, begin at once to correct it. Resolve not to curse or swear tomorrow; or at least reduce the number of times until the habit is broken up.

Did you ever consider what a fearful example it is to others — to the young and especially to your own children? We all have an influence over others. And as nothing so easily inclines to virtue, so nothing so powerfully attracts to vice as the conduct of those around us.

Our Lord says, "Woe to that man by whom scandal cometh; better were it for him that a millstone were tied about his neck and he were cast into the sea."

And particularly, woe to the parent who scandalizes, who gives bad example to his children. The wicked example of the parent is frequently seen in the crimes of his posterity. For "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

How can an immoral parent teach the doctrines of morality? What effect will it have, if the parent who gets drunk and curses and swears teaches his child not to do so?

The child thinks the parent is about perfect. If the parent curses and swears, the child, no matter what he is taught, will say, "I am going to do just as papa does." If you love your children, then, if you love your neighbors, give them a good example.

The blasphemer is sure to be punished; if not in this world, in the next. In the Old Law promulgated by God Himself, we learn from the book of Leviticus xiv. 16, that the blasphemer was taken outside the camp and stoned to death by the people.

Blasphemy is still as great a crime, though not always punished in this world. The blasphemous kings, Antiochus and Herod, were literally devoured alive by worms.

In recent times we have heard of instances of blasphemers being instantly killed or struck dumb after uttering a horrible oath with out being given time for repentance. And is it any wonder that God should at times show His utter detestation of that unnatural, ungrateful crime, the total depravity of which will be known only in Eternity?

The great wonder is that He does not instantly strike down every one who dares to insult His Holy Name. Beware! blasphemer! the next time you curse and swear may be your last.

Abhor blasphemy, because nothing is more shocking than to curse God and His creatures with a tongue which has been sanctified by the body and blood of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion.

Blasphemy is the sin of the Jews who crucified the Lord, and it is the sin of the damned in hell. It is a scandal especially to the young. Woe to the parents who teach it to their children. It draws down God's malediction, His curse on those guilty of it.

Prayer is the best remedy for blasphemy. Pray devoutly, pray frequently, and you will not blaspheme, you will not curse and swear. Make a good confession in reparation for the past and resolve for the future to avoid bad companions and other occasions.

If you are about to curse or swear, or if you hear another blaspheme, say, "Blessed be God; Blessed be the name of the Lord; or, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,' or even politely ask him not to speak diabolical words. Christianity into their methods, and look for a solution of present ills in the organization on a Christian basis of that in which all men are most interested, namely, the ways and means of living in its application. God condemned all men to labor as a punishment for the sin of the head of the human race. 'Cursed is the earth in thy work,' we read in Genesis; 'with labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life.' In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." (Gen. iii. 17-19.)

GENERAL INTENTION FOR JANUARY

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.

THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL PEACE

Thirty years ago, Leo XIII., in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, described in a few graphic touches the elements of conflict which were then disturbing the world and preventing the reign of social peace. They were found in the expansion of industry, the changed relations of masters and workmen, the enormous fortunes of a few individuals, the utter poverty of the masses, the increased self-reliance and closer mutual combination of the working-classes, and finally a prevailing moral and social degeneracy. "The momentous gravity of this state of things," wrote the illustrious Pontiff, "fills every mind with painful apprehensions. Men are discussing it, practical men are proposing schemes, legislators and rulers of nations are all busied with it, and actually there is no question which has taken a deeper hold on the public mind."

Evidently our world has not improved much since 1891, nor have the evils complained of by the Sovereign Pontiff disappeared. Class is still at war with class, the rich and the poor are antagonistic, capital and labor cannot agree to be reasonable, masters and servants are in the grip of selfishness, unionism is opposed to individual freedom of effort, strikes, actual or threatening, are disrupting industry and commerce. All this sounds ominous for the promotion of social peace.

The War is undoubtedly responsible for the present state of affairs; for the conditions which the world has had to face since that horrible crisis ended show that, while war can subdue nations, those who survive war make little or no effort to crush the bitterness, suspicions and hatreds which war engenders. Ordinary people may not be able to define or to give a concrete name to what they know is wrong, but they feel that something is needed to stimulate kindlier feelings in the world, in order to bring people back to normal life, to enable men to live peaceably together, and thus contribute to the material prosperity of their nations as well as to their own spiritual welfare. The problem of arousing these kindly feelings is the one which presents itself at the present day and it ought not surely to be beyond the wit of men of good will to find the solution.

As the man in the street understands it, social peace means simply the tranquillity which pervades human society when the various elements which compose it are coordinated and in running order. In the wheelwork of a watch every cog has its place and its own work to do. As long as this delicate piece of mechanism is in good shape, it ticks off the minutes and hours correctly. Similarly, human society has its wheelwork composed of different classes of men, its rich and its poor, its employers and its employees, all of them beings to whom God has given intelligence which he wishes them to use for the purpose of finding peace and happiness.

It is true we need never expect complete peace or happiness in this world. The life of man is a warfare, and warfare in some form or other will always keep him busy here below; consequently the tranquillity of order, which is another name for peace, can never be anything but relative, depending as it does upon human wills, which are always changeable, and only too often perverse. All we may hope for socially in this life is not absolute peace between man and man, but merely a betterment of social relations.

Various methods have been suggested for the attainment of this end. Some people look for it in individual progress, aided by education and by the strength of public opinion; once a sense of solidarity becomes developed among the masses, personal ambition and selfishness, which are barriers to social peace, will fade away like mist before the morning sun. Other people, living in the glamor of a

false idealism and relying on what they term the innate goodness of the human race, feel that universal brotherhood will come eventually, but only after the present forms of society have disappeared; for instance, the golden age of peace will dawn when all men are proclaimed equal — whatever that means! Other people still, relying possibly on their own experience and on a closer study of the ills they meet with, put their confidence in institutions which teach civic virtue; they would regulate and limit the play of authority and consolidate social forces, even in the face of opposition.

No matter how absurd it may appear at first sight, there is usually a grain of common sense in suggestions made for human betterment; otherwise none of them would appeal to the intelligence of men. One should pick out what is sound and leave what is false. But is there not too much paganism in modern social theories? Why should not those theorists inject a little Christianity into their methods, and look for a solution of present ills in the organization on a Christian basis of that in which all men are most interested, namely, the ways and means of living in its application. God condemned all men to labor as a punishment for the sin of the head of the human race. 'Cursed is the earth in thy work,' we read in Genesis; 'with labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life.' In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." (Gen. iii. 17-19.)

Labor, then, is the law of life, a law universal in its interest and in its application, and all who share in the loss occasioned by the sin of Adam have only to submit to the spirit of humility and obedience to the inexorable decree. If the problem of labor could be disposed of to the satisfaction of the multitude, men's mutual relation would evidently be improved, and social peace would be in sight. Were one dilating on social peace to pagans who know not the true God or His decrees, one might invoke the dictates of the natural law imbedded in every human heart; but in treating with those who believe in God, who accept His doctrines and who recall the promise of heaven, which is to be fulfilled after the trials and sufferings of this life are over, one can only appeal to what Christianity teaches, namely, the obligation of tempering all our relations with our fellow-men with the virtues of justice and charity—charity being the nobler of the two.

The majority of sane thinkers are convinced that the condition on which social peace in this age depends lies in the Christian organization of labor, which unites in some form or other is imposed on all men. What is really needed for sound peace in the world is that spirit of brotherhood which our Lord, in His discourse at the Last Supper, outlined for His followers in all ages. Prayer for a peace that the world cannot give fell from His Divine lips, and the members of our League do not forget this tradition. Inspired by the example of His Master, every time they repeat His words, "Thy Kingdom Come," they pray for the extension of the gift of peace and good will among men.

However, prayer without conviction and without the desire to give it practical effect, will not avail much; we must feel the need of what we ask for. As Christians we cannot look at social peace as something external to ourselves, something good enough for our neighbor, something in which we have no part. Justice and charity in our thoughts towards all men, whether they be capitalists or laborers, rich or poor, is the way to social happiness. Each one of us, according to his station in life, has a responsibility to promote this spirit, something we shall not do if we do not, first of all, excite in ourselves the conviction that justice and charity are the two virtues which are sadly lacking in human relations in the world today.

So much for personal conviction; but are they looking for peace and good will among men who in their daily conversations keep wounds open that should have long been closed? We must admire the wisdom of the labor leaders who gave some sound advice to their followers in the recent transactions with the United States Railway Labor Board, when they asserted that "all good Americans should refrain from loose talk and provocative language about either side of the controversy. Neither of the parties should be blamed or irritated by unwarranted denunciations or insinuations from irresponsible sources." Venomous tongues are the enemies of social peace.

Finally, actions count more than words. Neither justice nor charity is shown when men will act in a way that causes dissatisfaction among those with whom they have to deal; for instance, when a captain of industry by his injustice gives his thousands of workmen reason for revolt; or when a merchant bent on profiteering, exploits the poverty of his customers; or when a workman, becoming too exacting and ambitious, is not satisfied with a just wage. Such men, no matter what their grade in society may be, are not trying to promote social peace.

It is not the world which is going away, but the men who live in it, and when we speak of the world we mean not Christianity as a whole, but individuals who profess it. Let each one examine his conscience and see how much or how little he is contributing to the work of setting the world straight. Justice tempered by charity will conquer in the end; mutual love and forbearance is the secret of social peace. The early pagans admired the disciples of Christ for their charity, and exclaimed, "See how these Christians love one another!" Our latter-day pagans should take note of this and should at least try to adopt it experimentally, for the abyss which has been dug and which separates men would not exist if they realized the far-reaching effect of charity and justice.

If we desire, however, to go deeper and get at the root of existing evils, we shall see that it is to be found in the lessening of men's faith in God and in His promises. The ruin of faith draws after it the ruin of the two virtues so essential to social peace. Leo XIII. merely gave expression to a very old experience when he asserted that charity grows less in proportion to the loss of faith. The desire of wealth and honors and pleasures dries up the heart rapidly in circles where Christian life is no longer breathed; and clashes are inevitable when men's hopes run no higher than the wealth and the luxury of this world. The same Pontiff, in a practical example, outlined one of the results of the loss of faith; and asserted that every principle and every religious sentiment disappear from laws and public institutions when defenceless workmen find themselves handed over to the mercy of inhuman masters and to the cupidity of shameless competition.

But workmen who form the mass of population in every country have also their responsibilities. They, too, may become tyrants when sweet reasonableness ceases to control their counsels. "Live and let live," is a maxim that has many practical applications. The sooner both these classes of human society learn that all things here below are relative, that there is no such thing as absolute happiness this side of the grave, the sooner they will perceive that humble resignation to many inevitable ills is the road to social peace.

If men will recall the words of St. Paul: "Let each esteem others better than themselves," each considering the things that are his own but those that are the other men's, we may hope for the betterment which our present Pontiff desires and for which he asks our earnest prayers during the present month.

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

THE CHALLENGE TO AUTHORITY

The unprecedented challenge to authority is the first of the five great plagues which Pope Benedict recently enumerated as afflicting humanity. The scholarly address of Mr. James E. Beck before the American Bar Association has served to accept in America this profound utterance of the Holy Father. But how many who read the Holy Father's words ever pause to consider that the spirit of lawlessness denoted therein takes its rise from the disregard of religious principles. Whatever authority there is in the world comes from God. Therefore the conscious or unconscious elimination of Almighty God as a factor in daily life must in the last analysis be the malefic force that is destroying authority.

The basis of authority can be logically traced back to God, if anyone will take the trouble to reason the thing out for himself. To save people this trouble however Father Hull in the *Bombay Examiner* has reasons for it out with himself for the benefit of busy mortals who have no time to think. This is how he puts it:

"The source of authority is authority; and authority is the basis of respect, reverential love, obedience and loyal service. God is the Supreme Author, the Creator of men. Therefore He is our Lord and Master, and the proper object of our respect, reverential love, obedience and loyal service. Parents are secondary authors of their own children, and from this fact derive a title to the respect, reverential love, obedience and loyal service of their children. These two authorities on them is also direct. But besides this there is such a thing as indirect or derivative authority in the world. By Divine constitution the family is the unit of the human race. Under Divine Providence, families have coagulated into tribes, and tribes into nations. The unity of these larger units is only achieved by some kind of government. A nation is built on the analogy of the family, so that the government takes the place of the head of the family or parents. We can soundly interpret Divine Providence to mean therefore that the government as an institution not as an individual or group, derives from God a delegated authority to rule the nation and hence possesses a derivative title to respect, reverential love, obedience, and loyal service such as is due from children to their parents, and from all mankind to God. Providence has placed me by the circumstances of birth in a

certain family, and thus determined for me the parents to whom respect, reverence, love, obedience and loyal service are due. Providence has also placed me through birth in a certain nation, and this determines for me the Government to whom respect, reverential love, obedience and loyal service are due."

The reverend author gives this exposition to prove that patriotism is not only a sentiment but a virtue. Similarly we may take it as a proof that obedience to lawful authority, Divine as represented in God and His Church, or human as represented in the parent, the family and the government is not a pretty sentiment to be observed according to individual caprice, but a stern duty to be inexorably performed at the risk of God's punishment. A more general realization of this truth and its effective translation into action, will do more than all the courts and parliaments of the world to check lawlessness and to bring erring humans back to peace, freedom, and prosperity.—The Pilot.

A NON-CATHOLIC'S TESTIMONY

The Dublin Irish Times, a Unionist organ, prints a letter from Howard Hely, who, a leading Dublin Unionist, is also a member of the Dublin Board of Guardians—in which he says: "At first I thought my presence on the Dublin Board of Guardians would prove unpleasant to me. I have come to change my opinion after a year and a quarter's work with my Sinn Féin colleagues. Although a non-Catholic and a non-Sinn Féin, I have always been allowed to give free expression to my views of the tactics and aspirations of the Sinn Féin movement, although they must, at times, have necessarily been very unpleasant to my Sinn Féin friends. From the three non-Sinn Féin Guardians there have been elected chairmen of committees, and I would have been similarly honored were it not for my defective hearing. There was a complete absence of political or religious considerations in making appointments under the Board. In conclusion, he states that there is not, nor is there likely to be, anything in the nature of religious persecution under Sinn Féin, to the good-will of which the sole passport is to be "a good Irishman." Such testimony to the fairness and liberality of Sinn Féin Ireland throws out, by contrast, the cruel Sixteenth Century narrowness and venomous hatred of its neighbors—which is the leading characteristic of Belfast.—Catholic Transcript.

A STRIKING ANALOGY

The striking analogy that exists between the world today at the close of the Great War and the world that existed in the year 340 at the close of the reign of Constantine has been remarked by many present day scholars. Signor Guglielmo Ferrero is the latest writer to compare the Roman with the modern civilization. In his latest volume, *The Ruin of the Ancient Civilization and the Triumph of Christianity*, with *Some Considerations of the Europe of Today*, the Italian historian surveys the period between the death of the Emperor Severus in 235 and the close of the reign of Constantine in 340. He traces the decline of the spirit of authority and the ultimate dissolution of the mighty pagan empire. It collapsed under the weight of its own corruption and before the onslaught of the barbarians.

With many of the views of Signor Ferrero Catholics cannot agree. They cannot agree for instance that Christianity was one of the disintegrating factors of Roman civilization. The first part of St. Augustine's great work, *The City of God*, was written to expose this very fallacy, and with irrefutable arguments the great doctor absolutely pulverized the pagan contention that Christianity was responsible for the internal troubles of the Roman empire. He likewise advanced the explanation that if Christianity could be said in one sense to accomplish the demolition of old Rome, it was by sapping the foundations of paganism and im-

morality just as a builder clears away rubbish and debris, in order that the noble structure of the City of God could supplant the city of the world.

Drawing a parallel between the world at the close of the reign of Constantine and the world today, Signor Ferrero sees the many radical vices at work, that caused the ruin of Roman civilization. Paramount among these vices is the destruction of the principle of authority. The growing tide of anarchy if not stemmed, joined with the corruption of morals he contends will engulf every country of the world. The lesson that such a history teaches is clear as sunlight. The civilization which Christianity introduced on the ruins of old pagan Rome saved the world of that day from chaos and gave birth to the most magnificent centuries that civilization has ever witnessed culminating in the thirteenth and greatest of all centuries. Only by a return to the same Christian civilization today will the world be saved from the disaster that it is openly predicted will follow the rejection of authority and the deterioration of morals.

"It is a matter of common his torical knowledge," Theodore Maynard reminds us, "that the unity of our civilization which is common to Europe and America, was destroyed at the Reformation. As is usual in such cases, its full effects were not immediately apparent. The world had its store of acquired momentum, which carried it along after the motive supplied by the Catholic Church was taken away, but the acquired momentum is almost exhausted, and either the original motive power is to be brought back or a new motive power if such there be, discovered." The only remedy to escape the precipice to which the hyphat that modern society has taken is leading, is for the world to alter its course and get back on the straight highway of Christianity. The former way leads to the abyss, the latter to peace, progress, and ultimate happiness.—The Pilot.

Happy, indeed, are they whose intercourse with the world, has not changed the tone of their holier feelings or broken those musical chords of the heart the vibrations of which are so melodious, so tender, and so touching in the evening of their lives.



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