

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOU, D. D.
LAST SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST

CHARITY AND OUR ENEMIES

"Brethren: We cease not to pray for you, and beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, and wisdom and spiritual understanding." (Col. 1: 9)

These glorious words of St. Paul have been re-echoed through the ages down to the present day. The priests of the Church must say them to the faithful in the same sense, for the Church, in her liturgy and in the Mass, requires her ministers to pray for the people. Nay, it is the principal duty of the ordained minister to offer up the sacrifice of the New Law to God for the people; and they need do nothing more than assist at this great sacrifice with attention and in a devotional attitude. They can not offer up the sacrifice themselves. It is only the priest who can do so—he who is especially chosen by God and ordained by one of the successors of the apostles, to whom Christ first gave the power to offer up His sacred body and blood. The Mass is said not only to glorify God and in recognition of His supreme dominion over us, but also in expiation for the sins of man and as an offering agreeable to God, for the people. It is also a prayer of supplication; all blessings needed by the people for their spiritual and temporal welfare are asked for from God. In a word, the Mass is the most perfect prayer, containing all the kinds of supplication; and, for this reason especially, we say that the words of the text are as truly addressed by the Church to Christians of today as they were by St. Paul to the earlier brethren.

How Catholics should rejoice at this fact! The knowledge of such a truth, too, should do much to make them daily express their gratitude to God for the greatest blessing He has given them—membership in the true Church. It was always the plan of God to have men help one another. One of the principal ends He intended in instituting marriage was mutual help. The history of man thus far also shows us how one must help the other. What an impossible life would be that of the individual who tried to run his span alone, unaided! We can not conceive such a state, and no rational man would ever attempt it. But God intended us to help one another in the spiritual life also; nay, as it is the more important of the two, He expects more mutual help among men spiritually. In fact, in the Gospel does He not extol these works above all others? What was the work of Christ but a work principally for our souls? His Church is an institution for the salvation of souls. And what He has done for men, He wishes men proportionately, to do for one another. Some are to do it because of their office as the consecrated of the Lord; others because they have dedicated their services to Him; and still others from simple duty and charity. Now, one of the principal ways in which this help is to be given is by prayer. Why? Because the greatest help one can have comes from God, and this favor God grants principally through prayer. He has told us so, and His responses to prayer have confirmed our belief in His promise. What greater help can come to man than that which comes from God, and, if it is obtained principally through prayer, how necessary it is for us to use this means for carrying out the command to help one another! St. Paul had much reason for telling the people that he and his followers prayed unceasingly for them, and he was conferring a great and never-ending benefit upon man by letting him know this fact. We knew that it would be continued in the Church, and that it would be practiced among the people themselves—one praying for another.

It is necessary for people to realize that real charity exists among them in the proportion that they fulfill this great precept. Our enemies may hate us, but this does not rob us of the opportunity of exercising charity toward them; we can—nay, we must—pray for them. The lack of charity on the part of others should make it blossom forth abundantly in us. Contrast, for instance, the charity of Christ with the wickedness of His enemies, and that of the martyrs with the hatred of their persecutors. These are the examples we must strive to imitate.

How much need have Catholics today, also, of this generous spirit of charity? We can not help noticing the lack of it on the part of most of our enemies. They are not helping us, especially not by prayer. They are endeavoring to destroy us by means unworthy of any one who professes the name of Christian. Their work is a work of hatred; it is—not in reality at least in desire—a work similar to that employed by the enemies of Christ and by the cruel persecutors of bygone ages. They are not doing their worst, because a higher civilization will not permit it in all cases; but judging from their threats and their manner of attacking us, they would do worse if they could. In fact, we have had very recent examples of its being done in a country not far distant from us. We always have believed, too, that in other countries where governments have fought Catholics, the law of expulsion would give way to the law of extermination, were it not that the modern world would have branded it a disgrace; not

that expulsion of innocent people is not a disgrace to a nation, but because the more or less indifferent do not consider it such.

Catholics never could depend upon the words of rulers, nor the guarantees of constitutions. In some instances both have been kept; but it often requires only a moment to change the whole situation. And how sadly both are often interpreted! Even in this country we are guaranteed freedom of conscience and worship, yet our government will allow the most unprincipled men to use its mail service in an attempt to bring about our extermination, or at least expulsion. What must be said of these men and societies that are ever at our throats? To say the least, there is no charity among them; there is no respect, no duty. Instead of using the Gospel method of helping and of saving one another, they are affiliating themselves with the scribes and Pharisees. But we must not do this. God is our help and our safety. Charity, which unites us to Him, makes us all-powerful; and that charity demands of us, as a duty, that we pray even for our bitterest enemies, that they may, if such be possible, be "filled with the knowledge of the will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

FRANCIS ELLIOTT

THE NOVELIST WHO LEANED AGAINST THE VATICAN WALL AND FOUND NEW STRENGTH

In all dispatches announcing the death of Francis Perry Elliott—a lonely and impecunious patient at St. Mary's Hospital, Tucson, Arizona—I wonder why none mentioned that the late author had asked a convert to Catholicism? I do not deny the wisdom of emphasizing the fact that the author of such novels as "Pals First," "Lend Me Your Name," "The Haunted Fajamas," and others not quite as famous, should have died in debt. It is nearly all of them, in the mad intoxication of creative effort, have felt above the need of spiritual support. If they went to church at all, it was to satisfy an objective interest in, let us say, cathedral architecture—not in any humility of spirit, not, as our Irish mothers used to say, for the good of their souls.

He took to leadership easily. From his late twenties he was silver-haired and this, of course, lent a touch of mature experience to his native sagacity. His hair completed the picture of Francis Perry Elliott, the aristocrat.

It was no surprise to see him being weaned away from public school to the more chief ideal was "the gentler tradition," as Santayana calls it. He was president of Belmont College for a while, and when he left the Nashville "female" college, it was to take the head mastership of a fashionable school for girls called "The Castle," still, I believe, located at Tarrytown, New York.

From there he joined the house of Harpers, and wedded himself thereafter to editing and writing. But his work as an educator and as an author, like similar efforts of Henry Adams, always seemed to outsiders as the hobbies of an aristocrat, rather than the means to a livelihood. I think he took a certain pride in this concealment, and no one knew that most of his income had disappeared when he went west to Denver for his health about eighteen years ago. He edited "The Great Southwest" while there, and through his wife's constant care was well again in a year.

When he was ready to return to New York an ironic thing happened. His wife, the daughter of a doctor, became critically ill and, through a great deal of bungling among surgeons, died.

Elliott never got over the loss of his "Winnie" Payne. He left Denver and returned to New York with a trunk and a broken heart. In his trunk were several neatly penned notes, put there by his "Winnie" before she died, and marked "Frank's Plots." He had never written fiction. He didn't believe an editor could. Yet among those notes was the germ of "The Haunted Fajamas," which was to become the laughing sensation of that year.

never got beyond the fifth chapter, but even these five chapters show it to be a story of amazing plot, structure and action. Finished, it would have brought him at least \$20,000 in serial, book, dramatic and motion picture productions.

Very straight, slender, white-haired, aristocratic and with all outward appearances of the man of substance, Elliott fitted the Episcopalian ideal very well. It served him during the years when he felt only a minor need for spiritual support. But when his house of cards tumbled down, when he was genuinely sick in body and soul, scrimping along on \$60 a month, his old pride torn to tatters, the diluted dogmas of Anglicanism couldn't hold him up any longer. So he leaned against the Vatican wall and found strength.

He was living in an ugly barn-like house in Prescott, Arizona, when the thing happened in the summer of 1923. He had a room with cracked walls and few comforts, in a house with several of the younger generation, all desert derelicts seeking hope in that land of new beginnings. He ate food delicately cooked in the Southern style from a craved, and he saw views from his front porch unsurpassable beauty. But he didn't get the spiritual food that his soul craved until a little Spanish Padre—tense, keen, with the animated eyes of the born missionary came to see him.

THE PADRE WHO HAD LITTLE ENGLISH

His name was Father Camilo Torrente and he belonged to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Padre could talk very little English and the Pentent no Spanish. But in a month I was being called to witness the noted author's First Holy Communion. It was Friday, September 7, 1923. It was a very beautiful service in that dingy, plaster-cracked room and we were both emotionally moved, as well we might have been. From then to his death hardly a week passed that he did not see Francis Perry Elliott receiving Holy Communion.

When he returned to Tucson in October of that year and his friend, Harold Bell Wright, made arrangements for him to stay at St. Mary's Hospital, conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph, Elliott was in loving hands until the day he died. His money ran out shortly after he became a patient and he didn't seem to get to the point physically where he could write. This worried his proud and gentle soul terribly, but the good Sisters made it clear to him that he mustn't think about his bills. They knew he would pay if he ever got well, and if he didn't get well, then it wouldn't matter.

The Mother Superior, Sister M. Victoria, and Sister M. Christina, were particularly close to him. They did every conceivable thing for his comfort. With them he was an artist, a great artist, and of the Faith.

To his friends (and he had all kinds from county sheriffs to university presidents), who came to see him, none knew of his conversion. At least none spoke of it. I recall only one exception. A delegation of Masons came to visit him. He had been a Mason. They talked on and on and he seemed to be hitting them in so many vital spots that they finally asked him what kind of a Mason was he to talk like that. Then he explained what had happened in the last year. It should be said to their credit that they visited him just as frequently after learning of his conversion to Catholicism as before. He was that kind of a man. Those with the slightest love for the finer side of life were drawn to him irresistibly.

HIS HAPPIEST DAY

But the day that was perhaps his happiest in a comparative sense, for he never was really happy anywhere since his wife and mother had died, and his exile in Arizona only heightened his silent grief, was the day of his Confirmation: April 21, 1924. He had suffered a stroke only a few months before and was still unable to walk to the altar to take the Sacrament. His nurses dressed him in a blue suit, however, and piloted him in a wheeled chair from the Sanatorium to the Sisters' chapel. There he comprised a Confirmation class all by himself. It was a beautiful ceremony. The little chapel—trim, immaculate with the desert sun shining in through its west windows—had a generous sprinkling of nuns and nurses who had come to see their pet patient confirmed. He was wheeled as close to the altar rail as possible.

Bishop Gercke, who had been sent to take charge of the Diocese of Arizona only a few months before, after years under Cardinal Dougherty in Philadelphia and in the Philippines, was to do the confirming. He explained the sacrament and its spiritual significance, keying his explanation in language and ideas that showed he felt a great intellectual as well as a spiritual camaraderie for the man of ideas he was about to confirm.

He felt it a signal honor. He told me so. He told everybody so. And to show that the world was very human, even in its most spiritual moments, he was allowed to remain in his best blue suit and to eat dinner at a table in his room. I shared a fried chicken feast with him.

NUN SUPPLIES CIGARS

Later, Mother Victoria visited us and added a touch of the earth to a day of spiritual exultation by giving us some excellent cigars. I hate cigars, but these seemed to be made of some heavenly tobacco. Anyway, I never enjoyed a smoke more. Going home I gave the remaining cigar, in a moment of pure Christianity, to the taxi driver, and regretted it almost immediately. To this day I have never been able to find a cigar like it.

I really think that was the last happy day Elliott had. He did have a momentary thrill near the end when four volumes arrived from London which, when opened, revealed an English edition of his "Pals First." John Long had just brought it out—nine years after Harpers had published the original in America. Quite a proud moment for an impoverished and fatally ill author. But the royalties never came quickly enough to help him.

His last letter to me, and about the last he ever wrote to anybody, I suspect, lies before me. It shows him the incorrigible New Yorker, for he was forever hungering for places which were never more than a mile from Times Square. "Sister has given me the opportunity of enclosing a note with here—," he wrote. "Everything as usual here. Mr. Wright (Harold Bell Wright) was sorry to miss you again. "Have just finished Sunday Morning 'Star.' My eye jumped like a repelled electric spark from such points as Nogales. . . . Pima Dean So-and-so says (and I understand) and jumped hungrily and gratefully to an obscure live or six lines telling of a holdup in a little store over on Third Avenue, New York. Just the same, I wonder how many Sunday mornings New York can produce that are up to this."

"I had a 'stack' of cornakes this morning—delicious, life-saving—all thanks to that good friend of us both, Sister Christina. I feel better and I'm sure my pulse and nerves are better. For one thing, I have less homicidal feelings towards those who run the phonograph upstairs. More spirit of 'live and yet live' which we must all practice.

READS LITTLE FLOWER'S LIFE "Am reading with delight the autobiography of Soeur Therese of Lisieux—'The Little Flower.' Began it all with skeptical, hostile feelings. All changed. You must read this. As a craftsman, you can detect, as I did, that it's a true piece of work. She did write it, and it's beautifully done."

And when he went, he went alone, so the papers said. "Denied the consolation of a single friend or relative," one phrased it, "to make his passing easier, Francis Perry Elliott, gifted author whose stories have entertained thousands, died Wednesday at St. Mary's Hospital." This was true, and yet it gave a wrong impression. Harold Bell Wright, for instance, had visited him three hours before he died.

SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS

Of course, as a matter of fact, he was surrounded by the best friends a man can have in this world. The Sisters of St. Joseph hovered about him and prayed at his desert bedside until the end came at 10 o'clock at night, August 13. They made his passing easier. In fact they made it about perfect. Up to the day he died he had been hostile to death, acting often as if he felt that the nuns and nurses could make him well if they wanted to. But ten hours before the end he said to Sister M. Christina, "Don't let me sleep today, Sister. This is my last day on earth and I have a great deal to do."

"GOD BLESS ME"

"Tis a queer world, and queer it is what persons will smile at and what they will endure. One of the most promising young baseball players to break into the Big Leagues in recent years had contracted the blasphemous habit of using the Holy Name when a misplay was made or things didn't go just right. His teammates and opponents heard him, and so did spectators in the stands; nothing came of it until an umpire who had seen many years of service called him aside one day and quietly corrected him.

The other day on an elevated train there was an elderly lady with a curly-haired girl of about five years of age. The little tot sneezed and quickly said rather loudly: "God bless me." Passengers smiled and the child, turning to her companion, confusedly inquired: "Grandma, isn't it right to say 'God bless me,' when I sneeze?" There is the sore spot in the every-day life of so many in the home, at

work and at play—the cause of so many of our troubles, the solution of our problems: we have forgotten to say, at the right time: "God bless me."—Catholic Standard and Times.

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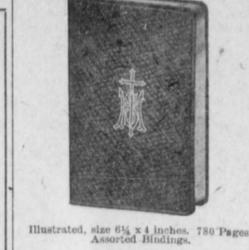
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