

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR RELIGION

Thou art My beloved Son: in Thee I am well pleased. (Luke 11, 35)

It at first sight appears strange that God the Father should have expressed His delight in the person of Christ. He was God's Son—therefore, God—and hence, necessarily must be perfect in all his qualities. Whatever perfection was found in the Almighty Father—and it was infinite—existed in no less a degree in Jesus Christ Himself, who was of the substance of the Father, begotten from all eternity. A moment's reasoning is enough to convince any one of this truth.

In a sense, this statement from God the Father was needed. Not, however, because there could be any real, well-founded doubt concerning the infinite perfections of Christ, but because the people needed this instruction, in order that they might have the proper idea of Christ and of the truth of His mission. They were yet infants in Christianity. The sublime truths regarding it and its Author had to be taught them, so that they could grow into strong adults in the knowledge of their faith. Christ appeared to be a human being like themselves, and they might have considered Him only a simple man. So God, His Heavenly Father, made it clear to them that He was His Son. This action of God the Father was also a consolation to Our Saviour in His humanity. He was doing His Father's work well, both as God and as man. As God He enjoyed the beatific vision and no happiness on earth could come to Him that would be new. But as man He could suffer. He could, as it were, yearn for a word of cheer and appreciation from His Father, to accomplish whose ends He had descended to earth. It was, therefore, a demonstration of God's goodness, both in sight of the people and before His divine Son, when He said those sweet encouraging words to Christ.

But it was also done for another reason, with another purpose in view. It was to serve as practically a command to us to learn well who Christ is, and to become familiar with the doctrines of our faith. In other words, we must take an intellectual pleasure and delight in the great truths that God has revealed to us, through His divine Son. These revelations were not made known to us in order to be forgotten, nor was there lacking on the part of God an intention that we take a lively interest in them. We must realize their importance, for they are the noblest of all truths, and our minds may profitably dwell a lifetime upon them. It is true that they may not help us in our material welfare, but we never should forget that there is a higher, spiritual welfare to be kept always in view. We must endeavor to learn everything we can relating to it, in order to attend to it in the best way possible. We were made principally for this latter life, and we have the eternal command to value it more highly than the material. In other words, we must care more for our souls than for our bodies.

It is not pleasant to note the numbers of people of all classes, even Catholics, who are ignorant of so many of the great truths of God and religion. And it becomes more unpleasant to observe how the majority of them make no real attempt to step from their ignorance into light; nay, it is quite evident that they have no such desire. The heart does not occupy itself with the things of which it knows little or nothing. Attachment comes really from knowledge. The knowledge upon which we base our attachment may sometimes be false; but even then the attachment remains until this fact becomes known to us. With regard to religious truths, they can not be false, since God is their author, and the love we form for them never can discover any reason for its discontinuance. Through these truths, in a certain sense we pass to the love of God, whose infinite goodness and amiability never can be anything but true. This mutual affection is so strong that it never will lessen, unless we render false the qualities that cause God to love us as friends, or destroy their goodness. Where there is no interest manifested, or even only a passing one, no real love is found. So it is true of our connection with God. And what are we, bereft of God's love?

We can not exactly blame all those who are ignorant of the Faith, since many never were given opportunities of learning it. They may have lived in distant places, which were but seldom visited by a priest. Some have been prevented from learning the truth through the negligence of their parents. But this can not be said of those who are ignorant of their religion in the present generation. Literature, treating all the phases of our holy faith, and written in language that all can understand, is within easy reach at a nominal price. There are numerous Catholic publications, overflowing with instruction for old and young, which can be brought into the home at regular intervals at little expense. There are the sermons of the pastors, and of missionaries who come at regular periods, to instruct and arouse the people. All these help wonderfully in this direction. In the rectories,

instruction will be given cheerfully and willingly to any one who needs it. For the young, there are the parochial schools, the maintenance of which necessitates sacrifices being made by teachers and people. Yet how many send their children to other schools where they are never taught, even indirectly, anything that would tend to lead their thoughts toward God and religion. Ignorance today regarding the tenets of religion is in most cases due to carelessness and sin. It is no wonder that so many will stand by deaf, dumb, and mute, when they should be raising a voice of defense! And how can it be otherwise, for, not having weapons with which to fight their enemies, they must yield. Shame on them! Christ has said that he who refuses to confess Him before His Father He would not confess before Him in heaven. Those who fail to confess Him through culpable ignorance are no doubt as guilty as those who fail to do so through negligence.

Let Catholics arm themselves for the fight against ignorance, errors, and prejudice, by filling their minds with the truths of their religion, and, as far as possible, with solid reasons for the faith that is in them. Their interest, too, in the things that made them and who they expect will reward them, should urge them on to the work necessary to acquire this knowledge. To be good Christians, in the true sense of the word, they must be acquainted with their religion. Otherwise they become like quacks in the worldly professions, though even lower, for the latter make a pretense at true knowledge and often deceive people into believing in them. The quack Christian, however, can do nothing, for sincerity and love of his great God, of blessings should be his only arms: but these he is absolutely unable to have if God's grace reigns not in his heart and a true knowledge of religion dwells not in his mind.

GENERAL INTENTION FOR MAY

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI.

THE PRACTICE OF FREQUENT COMMUNION

Since the publication, twenty years ago, of the Papal Decree *Sacra Tridantina Synodus*, the topic of frequent Communion has been discussed so often and so thoroughly that it would seem there is nothing more that can be said about it. Books, pamphlets, even General Intentions of the League, have treated this important affair from every angle and have told Catholics throughout the world what a practical and unparalleled help to holiness frequent Communion is; so that no one should ignore what the doctrine of the Church is or what the practice of her children should be.

And yet we are asked again this month to revert to the subject of frequent Communion. Can it be that in a matter so important in the life of our souls we are beginning to forget essentials? Or are we growing indifferent in presence of God's great Sacrament of Love? Conformably to the wish of the Holy Father, let us put before the members of our League what is really nothing more than a restatement of a few obvious truths and the reasons why they should go to Communion frequently.

When treating this subject we should distinguish between what is ordered by the Church and what she merely counsels. As a divine precept, outlined in the Gospel, the obligation of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is imperative. It is not a mere invitation, which we are free to accept or reject; it is a divine order addressed by our Lord Himself to all who wish to save their souls. These are His words: "Amen, amen, I say to you except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood you shall not have life in you" (Joan. vi, 58). Here we have an ordinance serious enough to make even the most callous reflect, since the Divine Legislator inflicts on the transgression of it the most terrible of sanctions, namely, the loss of eternal life.

In order to keep this severe legislation before her children, the Church, the official and infallible interpreter of the wishes of her Founder, has prescribed two Eucharistic laws of her own; one applying to the faithful while they are in health, the other to those in danger of death. She has laid down the law that all who have reached the age of discernment—seven years, more or less—shall go to Communion at least once a year, at Easter, and she has made the observance of this law one of the essentials of Church membership. So rigorous, in fact, is this Easter duty that those who die, having neglected to perform it, are deprived of the suffrages of the Church and of burial in consecrated ground. Nay more, a person who, legitimately or not, has failed in this duty within the specified time, is obliged under pain of sin to go to Holy Communion at the earliest possible moment, even before the coming of the following Easter; for a time limit is set not for the cessation of the obligation but rather for its enforcement. Again, all who have the misfortune to make a sacrilegious Easter duty have not satisfied the precept and are obliged to make a good Communion as soon as possible.

So much for the precept as it affects the faithful who are in good health; now for the further obligation of receiving Communion imposed on all who realize that they are in danger of death. So serious is this precept that when the sick are unable to help themselves, the duty of providing them with this strengthening food involves the consciences of doctors, nurses, families, and all who are near the sick in a position of trust. This double legislation shows the Church to be a wonderful Mother who wishes to be assured as to the spiritual health of her children during life and especially when they are about to leave this world. She knows that Holy Communion strengthens them to meet the trials and temptations of life, and that when they are fortified by the Holy Viaticum, they are able to enter the final struggle and bravely and confidently face the passage from time to eternity.

But it would be an error to conclude that this is all the Church asks her children to do in so grave a matter. In her legislation she lays down a precept which measures the minimum of what all are obliged to observe; but knowing what the wishes of her Divine Founder are, as well as the great profit those who would distinguish themselves in God's service might draw from Holy Communion, she counsels something more. Far from being satisfied with a cold, perfunctory Easter duty, she lovingly insists on the frequent, even the daily, reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. She teaches Catholics that in the Lord's Prayer it was the Saviour Himself who ordered them to say, Give us this day our daily bread. Did Christ have in mind merely the food that gives health and strength to the body? The martyrs, the saints, and all other holy men and women in the history of the Church, answer with an eloquent negative. Invariably they interpreted the words of the Lord's Prayer in a spiritual sense. St. Hilary tells us that the Saviour had so ardent a desire to come to us daily and to live within us that He ordered us to ask every day for our daily bread. "How often unheedingly do we recite the Our Father! 'If this Bread is a daily bread,'" exclaimed St. Anthony, "why do we wait so long before partaking of it? Receive it every day, so that it may meet the needs of your daily life."

Every morning in our parish church the priest celebrates the Sacrifice of the Mass, a Sacrifice which is complete only when those present share with the celebrant the Divine Victim immolated on the altar. Not that the Communion of the faithful is in any sense an integral portion of the Holy Sacrifice, but it is the ideal fulfillment of the law of sacrifice, and was the universal practice of the Apostolic Church, when, according to a modern writer, "faith was almost veneration and charity was a consuming fire." In order, therefore, to respond to tradition as well as to the wishes of the Saviour to seek daily the Heavenly Bread, the faithful should receive with the priest at Mass. What a marvelous transformation would be effected in the lives of Catholics throughout the world if everyone assisting at the Mass were to receive Holy Communion; and how conformably this sublime act performed daily would be to the desires of the Sacred Heart!

All the members of our League should take as addressed to themselves the words of Christ to His apostles "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you" (Luc. xxii, 15). He wants them to share in the feast of His love. "Tell them," says a pious writer, impersonating the Divine Saviour, "tell them that I came down from Heaven and now live with them on earth to show them that My delight is to be with the children of men. I have hidden myself under the form of bread, in order the easier to nourish them. Designedly I have depouled myself of the brilliancy that should surround Me, so that they may not be dazzled. All my pleasure is to speak with them and enter into an alliance with them; so close that they may be all in them and they all in Me. Why do they shun Me? Do they count all My signal graces for nothing? I am the Life, and those who receive Me shall live forever. I came to love, not to be feared; to be received as food, not simply to be honored. It is to purify their bodies that I give them My Body and Blood; it is to sanctify their souls that I give them My Soul; it is to unite them to My Divinity that I give them My Humanity united to it. All wise though I am, I cannot conceive anything more advantageous for them; all rich though I am, I have nothing more precious to give them; all powerful though I am, I can give them nothing greater than My Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist. We have in the sacraments the wish of Christ our Lord urging us to frequent Communion; how can we remain cold and unmoved at such manifestations of love?"

This desire of our Lord to be united to the children whom He redeemed was a fact appreciated in Apostolic times and in the ages immediately following. Those who lived with Him and heard His doctrines, as well as the converts of the succeeding centuries, understood so well what His intentions were that they frequently gathered together and "preserved in the communication of

the breaking of bread" (Acts ii, 42). While the teaching of the Church on the reception of Holy Communion has not changed, her members, in the course of centuries, ignoring their most sacred interests, have failed to follow the example set by their primitive brethren. Little by little they got out of touch with the early traditions and yielded to the chilling influences of a pagan and materialistic environment. But the Catholic Church, vigilant Mother that she is, recalled them now and then to their duties. She legislated for them in a solemn way when, in 1215, her Pontiff, Innocent III, laid down the stringent law concerning the Easter duty. Seven hundred years later, in 1905, the solemn voice of another Pontiff, the saintly Pius X., the Pope of the Eucharist, was again heard by three hundred millions of Catholics, urging them to go to Communion often, daily if possible. He told his vast spiritual family, a three hundred millions strong, and dispersed throughout the Universe, that "frequent and daily Communion, as a thing most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the faithful of whatever rank or condition of life; so that no one who approaches the holy table with a right and devout intention can lawfully be hindered."

These words, sounding like an echo from the Primitive Church, should be taken to heart by all. Let Catholics shake off their timidity and lukewarmness and receive the life-giving Sacrament frequently, daily if possible. It is not too late to make up for the time that has been lost; God has many precious graces still in store for those who will make some effort to show their love for Him by receiving Him often. Let them persevere in the practice of daily Communion until it has become a habit. For those who shall have acquired the habit, what a consolation when the supreme moment arrives! It is then that the meaning of our Lord's words will reveal itself in all its fulness: "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day."

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

N. Y. TESTS PLAN FOR RELIGIOUS STUDY

New York.—The Board of Education of this city has selected Public School 46, St. Nicholas Avenue and 156th Street, for the purpose of experimenting on the systematic religious instruction for children of the Public schools according to an announcement made yesterday by William J. O'Shea, Superintendent of schools. The decision to inaugurate the experiment, was the direct outgrowth of the meeting held last Sunday at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel by Chapter Theta Pi Alpha, of the Association of Catholic Teachers of the Public schools. The experiment is to be conducted under the direction of the city school authorities and representatives of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish clergy.

Although the subject of religious instruction for the Public school children has been discussed among educators and clergymen in this city for many years no definite decision could be arrived at by the members of the Board of Education as to the proper regulation of the course to be pursued, and if the plan to be tried out within a month in the school designated proves satisfactory systematic religious training and instructions for Public school children may become a reality.

Under the proposed plan of operation the children will be sent for religious instruction to the churches or synagogues of their respective faiths for one hour a week. Later this may be extended to two hours or a longer period. It has not been decided as yet just what day of the week will be selected, nor has it been decided whether the period set aside for such instructions will be held after the regular classes are dismissed. It was understood however, that it is the purpose at this time to close the regular school sessions one hour earlier than usual, and the children, assembled according to their faiths and under the direction of their teachers, will be taken to the centers of religious instruction.

It was also made known that no child will be compelled to attend religious instruction if there is parental objection and no instruction of a religious nature is to be given in the Public school building itself.

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