

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE POWER OF FAITH

"At that time, entering into a boat, Jesus passed over the water and came into His own city. And behold they brought to Him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son thy sins are forgiven thee." (Matt. ix, 1, 2)

Faith seems limitless in its power. Throughout the whole Gospel we have excellent examples of the wonderful benefits faith brings to man. It causes His Maker from His throne to look down upon him with a sympathetic eye, while allowing him, poor earthly creature, to raise his heart to love His God, to lift his eye to see Him, and to elevate his mind to come to the knowledge of Him. When faith abides in a man, as it did in the instance related in the text, it is almost impossible to enumerate the blessings that it may bring to him. And, after all, to a person well disposed, faith is easy of acceptance. It does not require study, nor labor, nor any great sacrifice. It is true that many outside the fold look upon faith as a sacrificing reason. This is not so. Rather is it the ennobling of the highest faculties of man, for when a man believes on faith he believes on the authority of God. When he believes, history, he accepts it on the authority of the historian, who is but human and fallible. When he submits to the laws of science, he places himself, as a rule, under the laws of the material world. So it is with whatever we believe in this world, on the authority of any other than God. It must all be human, no matter how learned the man from whom it proceeds, and we need make no apology for faith. Those who do not possess it need more than an apology to those who do, whom they frequently ridicule. Such a curse as the total absence of faith is more deplorable than the misfortune of ignorance, for unbelief is more debasing than lack of knowledge. The humblest person can have a faith that will carry him to the most sublime truths of heaven, but he can not always—nor does he very often—have even a knowledge of the highest truths of earth. On the other hand, many a one with a great and comprehensive knowledge of the things of earth has no faith. Who will doubt that the position of the former is better? Human knowledge will count as nothing toward the final perfection of men, unless it is joined with faith; whereas faith, without even a pretense of human knowledge, will make one see God as He is.

Faith fills the mind with the blessedness of heaven, and it forms temples of righteousness and peace in this world. It makes the human eye look beyond the fleeting things around it; it causes the heart to love more than the things with which it comes in immediate contact, and it enables the mind to rise to a sublimity far above its natural powers. Faith is the sweetened oil, gentle and refreshing, that flows over the wants of suffering humanity. It is a balm to the arrow-pierced heart, and it is the tie that links man to man and man to God in the bonds of purest love. Well has it been said in the Gospel that if one possesses faith he can move mountains. It may not be that we can move these mountains in a material way, but the figure serves to show us how strong faith is. By faith we can fathom the reason and the reality of their existence. Though huge, grand, and majestic, we rise from them to One who is seated high above them. As we gaze upon them in all their beauty and magnificence, we realize, too, that they must pass, that their solidity will not always be stable, and that some day they will crumble like all other material things. It would be impossible for man to begin to enumerate the blessings that faith brings to us during our pilgrimage on earth. He alone who possesses faith can speak of it; he who is without faith knows nothing of it.

The reason why people do not understand the catastrophes that occur in the world, the unpleasantness of life, the uncertainty of the future, and the hard sufferings of daily existence, is because they lack faith. Without faith it is impossible to understand life, to know whence we came and whither we are going. It may be said it is a good argument to prove the necessity of faith, from the fact that we do not know our religion without it, and, as a consequence, could not know our end and did we not possess faith. But God has been more generous in the blessings that He has given us, because of our faith. He has not intended faith simply for our knowledge, for the elevation of our minds to things existing in another sphere, but he who has intended it to help us even in a material way in the sphere in which we live. Outside of him who has felt these benefits, no one knows this better than he who deals with people who have faith. The only real consolation of the minister of God in his work for the Lord is the fact that he sees solid faith in those among whom he labors. He knows that every throb of these hearts is different from that of those deprived of faith. He knows that the words that fall from their lips are more truthful than the words of those who have not faith. He knows that the sub-

mission with which they accept the ills of life is more sincere than that of those who know not God by faith. He feels that he can rise with confidence and speak to them of God, of religion, and of other things that relate to God. He will be given a willing ear, he will please their hearts and will enlighten their minds. He will make up to it, and to have any assurance of persevering in it. It is true that faith and sin can be co-existent in a man, but such faith is dead. We refer to a heavenly faith—a faith that makes a person live, hope, and love; a faith that makes him overcome all the difficulties of life, traveling unswervingly the path set for him, and finally reaching a safety that is eternal. A faith, in other words, by which we live, with which we live, and in which we live; a faith that brings us to the presence of God, where it will be turned into a true light by which we shall see God face to face, know Him as He is, enjoy Him eternally.

Blessed above all on earth is he who has faith, but he must pray in the words of the Gospel that he believe yet more, and above all things he must lead a life that will be consistent with his faith.

Instances are numerous in which people possessed of this greatest of blessings have in time lost it. Not only has this happened to individuals, but entire nations have fallen away. A review of the history of the world will convince us how lamentable are the consequences to those who have lost the faith with which God blessed them. From the first time that man sinned, God punished him for his lack of faith; and all the plagues and scourges that have come from the hand of God have been sent upon man not only because of his sins, but also because he had either lost faith or had neglected to live up to its practices. And people should remember that faith comes from God, hence every one may receive it; but, as with all other gifts of God, a person must be under the influence of divine grace to receive faith and live up to it, and to have any assurance of persevering in it. It is true that faith and sin can be co-existent in a man, but such faith is dead. We refer to a heavenly faith—a faith that makes a person live, hope, and love; a faith that makes him overcome all the difficulties of life, traveling unswervingly the path set for him, and finally reaching a safety that is eternal. A faith, in other words, by which we live, with which we live, and in which we live; a faith that brings us to the presence of God, where it will be turned into a true light by which we shall see God face to face, know Him as He is, enjoy Him eternally.

PILGRIMAGES IN ENGLAND

A. Hilliard Attard in America

Thirty-two years ago, on a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1892, a few hundred Catholics formed in procession outside the church of the English Martyrs in east London. The procession was formed two deep, headed by a large crucifix, and led by a priest and a layman, Father Philip Fletcher, and Lister Drummond, a London barrister, both of them converts from Anglicanism. The little band, saying the rosary aloud and singing hymns, marched to the open space on Tower Hill, where Blessed John Fisher of Rochester, and Blessed Thomas More won the crown of martyrdom in the days of Henry VIII. There prayers were said for England's conversion, and the procession reformed and returned to the church for Benediction. Along the line of route, people looked on, many of them puzzled at what it all meant, but the crowds were silent and respectful. Many of the men bared their heads as the Crucifix passed by.

The procession was the small beginning of a remarkable movement, which has done great things to deepen the faith of Catholics and to make the Catholic Faith and Catholic devotion known to large numbers of English non-Catholics. Five years before Father Fletcher and Lister Drummond had founded the "Guild of Our Lady of Ransom for the Conversion of England." It was as a propagandist activity of the Guild that they proposed these "processions of prayer" in the streets of London.

Few non-Catholics ever enter a Catholic Church (they said.) So we suggest that we should show them what Catholic faith and devotion are by bringing these processions out into the public streets. We shall honor our martyrs, invoke their aid, and at the same time give Protestants some idea of what we are and lead not a few of them to find out something more about the Catholic Church.

Processions of the Blessed Sacrament were out of the question, but the Crucifix and the statue of our Blessed Lady, escorted by white veiled children of Mary, might be features of these processions. When this was first proposed there were pessimists who predicted that it would only excite hostility; there would be riotous disorder and insults to holy things. That first procession to Tower Hill proved the alarmists wrong, and in the thirty-two years since then the people of London have always shown the same respect to our Catholic processions. Few at first in number, the processions have become more and more numerous in succeeding years. Now there are so many of them that, through all the summer months, in the various parishes of London and its suburbs, there are processions, now here, now there, every Sunday, and often two or three on the same day. They have become more elaborate in their organization, and instead of the few hundred of the first procession there are now often thousands in line. Early in the movement Father Fletcher had a happy inspiration. At first the line had

been formed in a narrow column two deep. "The police gave us the street," he said: "Let us take the whole street." So he introduced the "wide formation," with a front that takes the whole width of the thoroughfare. First comes the crucifix with its escort of acolytes, then right and left along the margin of the roadway the processionists in single file. In the broad space between here and there are placed bands of music; groups of men bearing the statue of Our Lady; shrines of relics of our martyrs and other religious emblems; banner bearers, and men chosen for their good voices to lead the recitation of the rosary and start the singing of the hymns. At last comes a band of acolytes escorting the clergy in their vestments. There are many places in London which were the scenes of martyrdom. A visit to these is often an incident in the procession. It ends with Benediction in some large church or in the open air in a convent garden.

The first procession each year, on the Sunday before May 4 (the feast of the English Martyrs), differs from all that follow. There are no bands of music, no banners, no lines of white-robed children of Mary. It has indeed a somber aspect. First comes a crucifix, then the procession, first of laymen, then of women, marching in "wide formation" reciting the rosary or singing a hymn. It follows the line of London's "martyr's way," the miles of streets running east to west from Newgate, once the martyr's prison, to the spot near the entrance to Hyde Park where once stood Tyburn gallows, where more than a hundred martyrs died. Along this same road they were dragged on hurdles to their death. On the way the processionists visit three churches, each linked with the history of the Faith in England, and at Tyburn they form in front of the convent, where day and night there is perpetual prayer for England's conversion.

"You think you can destroy the Faith in our country," said one of the martyrs as he stood by the gallows waiting for death. "I tell you that one day there will be a convent here at Tyburn." His prediction has been verified. When the procession thus forms on the wide roadway, from which the police have diverted all traffic, the Benediction service begins in the convent chapel, on the first floor of the house with windows opening on a balcony. The crowd joins in the hymns, and the bell rings, a priest bearing the monstrance appears on the balcony to give the Benediction, and the people kneel in adoration, and rise to sing the *Laudate*.

This year the pilgrimage-procession from Newgate to Tyburn was made through miles of streets swept by a storm of cold wind and pelting rain. It was a wonderful sight to see the crowd of men and women kneel, without exception or hesitation, on the rain-sodden roadway as the Blessed Sacrament appeared on the balcony. There is always a small police escort with the processions, not to protect them, for there is no disorder, but to regulate and divert the traffic and keep the way clear. This year after the Tyburn procession, in reply to Father Fletcher's letter of thanks for their attendance, the district chief of police (a non-Catholic) wrote to him:

It is a real pleasure to us (the police) to accompany your processions, because we know the spirit of love that actuates it, and you must feel proud of those who join in the procession, for whatever the weather they come along and show their fervor.

Besides their London "processions of prayer," the Guild of Ransom has for many years organized pilgrimages to other places all over England that are linked with memories of the days when it was a Catholic land and with the story of the martyrs. The pilgrimage to Canterbury has been thus revived, and each year after a service at the Catholic Church there is a procession through the city streets and visit to the scene of St. Thomas's martyrdom and the site of his shrine in the cathedral. There is another pilgrimage to the ruined abbey near King's Lynn, once famous for its sanctuary of "Our Lady of Walsingham." Another place thus visited is St. Albans, a few miles from London. Its abbey church, now an Anglican cathedral, has the empty shrine built in the Catholic Middle Ages for the relics of St. Alban, the first of the many martyrs of the Diocletian persecution in Roman Britain; and the pilgrims visit also the remains of the old city of Verulamium where the Saint lived, ruins laid bare by systematic excavation in recent years. Another pilgrimage is to the hill country of Derbyshire in central England, where the old chapel of Padley Hall, now used as a barn, was a place where Mass was said in secret in Elizabethan days and where two of the martyrs were arrested by the persecutors. Father Hugh Benson once preached the pilgrimage sermon standing by the chapel wall, and he has told its story in his romance of martyrdom "Come Rack, Come Rack!" There is a pilgrimage to Holywell in North Wales, where miracles are still worked at St. Winifrid's well.

Of the northern pilgrimages the most important is that to York. In the days of the Tudor persecutors the city was the center of the government for the north of England. Its castle was crowded with prisoners

for the Faith and at the place of execution outside the walls there were seventy-two martyrdoms. This year the York pilgrimage was a noble event. In the midst of the city are the ruins of St. Mary's Abbey, founded in the eleventh century, and for hundreds of years one of the great Benedictine houses. This year, by the courtesy of the local authorities, we were allowed to erect a temporary altar in the roofless walls of the abbey church, and on the spot where once its high altar stood. There was High Mass, with three Benedictine priests, the celebrant being a Benedictine Abbot, and a Benedictine choir sang the music of the Mass. A large congregation gathered from all parts of England, knelt on the grass-grown ground once covered by the vaulted roof of the church. It is hoped that this Mass in the ruins will be an annual event, but never again can it be the same epoch-making event as on that tenth of June when the kneeling crowd welcomed the return of the Sacramental Presence of Our Lord to the ruined church after four centuries of desolation.

Besides their value as acts of faith and devotion, these processions and pilgrimages are doing useful missionary work in various ways. At many of them there is a sermon on the Catholic Faith to which Protestant hearers are attracted. At some of them explanatory handbills are distributed in thousands to the onlookers on the line of route. The local press reports them as events of interest, and these reports are often the means of giving the Protestant public really useful information about Catholic life, teaching and practice. Thus, for instance, at York the leading paper of the city devoted several columns to its account of the pilgrimage and the Mass in St. Mary's ruins and the report was written not only in a most friendly spirit, but also with intelligent accuracy that made it instructive reading for the non-Catholic public.

CATHOLIC VIEW OF UNITY

An English prelate, Mgr. Moyes, was recently invited to address, as he had done a good many years ago, the (Anglican) Society of St. Thomas of Canterbury, whose object was the study of "Reunion." It is noteworthy that the founder of the society, Rev. Spencer Jones, and others originally associated with him, were present.

Mgr. Moyes' admirable address was summarized in the London Universe as follows: 1. To Catholics, unity is not an ideal, a goal; it is a present possession—and there is all the difference between unity "in the air" and unity possessed. The integrity of the Faith is a thing for which Catholics have had to lay down their lives in the past, and would do so again if need be. It is a thing not to be diluted, degraded, adulterated.

2. Nor is dogmatic unity a matter of accepting formularies or creeds; it is a matter of accepting the sense and meaning of those creeds. The idea of "finding a formula," in which people still retaining divergent beliefs can agree in mere external expression, is inconsistent with the convictions of Catholics about unity.

3. Hence the Catholic Church cannot tolerate the denial or undermining of her Faith. She cannot allow Christ to be contradicted within His own Household. By the very law of her life the Catholic Church is bound to eliminate heresy. No one whose ideas of unity include the toleration of heresy has any contribution to offer on the question of reunion that Catholics can look for as a precedent.

4. Throughout history the predominant sense of the Christian community has been decisive. Imagine, for the sake of argument, a council consisting of the bishops of the 300 million Catholics, of those of the 100 million Anglicans (if so many) in the world. How would the decisions be likely to go on the various points at issue? And what, on historic conciliar principles, would be the position of the minority?

5. As for the Divine provision for securing and preserving unity, it all comes back to the question of the Papacy, which to Catholics is fundamental. A Catholic preacher has lately been taken to task for saying that belief in the Papacy was held on the same grounds as belief in Our Lord. But suppose Our Lord came into the room and gave us certain teachings about His Divine person, and then went on to give us certain other teachings about His Church, should we not accept them equally? Of such quality is the conviction of Catholics in regard to the Papacy. In this sense all doctrines declared by Christ are on the same plane.

These and other points Mgr. Moyes put forward, not as inviting his audience necessarily to agree with them, but as statements of a position which all who want to talk to Catholics about "reunion" must face. In a very interesting discussion that followed, both Mr. Spencer Jones and other speakers showed that they fully realized this fact.

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
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