

FIVE-MINUTE SERMON

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

QUALITIES OF TRUE FORGIVENESS

"So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." (Matt. xviii, 35).

Our Saviour reminds us in to-day's Gospel that it is our duty to forgive our neighbors who have offended us. To Peter's question: "Lord, how often shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?" Jesus replied: "I say not to thee, till seven times, but till seventy times seven times," and then He gave the parable of the king as related in to-day's Gospel.

There are two reasons why we should forgive our enemies and offenders. In the first place, we may well forgive our neighbor when God has so often forgiven us much greater offenses than the one our neighbor is guilty of towards us, and, secondly, because it is the commandment of the Lord, and we can not hope to receive forgiveness or remission of sin from God unless we forgive our neighbors. While there is no doubt, then, that we must forgive our enemies and offenders, the manner of forgiving is perhaps not so clear, and I will try and explain how we must forgive.

1. The forgiveness of the offense must be in the first place be from the heart, i. e., our heart must be free from anger and hatred and no desire to avenge ourselves must remain. Our Saviour makes this plain when He says: "So shall also my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts." It is not sufficient to say: "I forgive my enemies," but our actions must correspond with the word; they must be free from hatred and malice. The Apostle refers to this when he wrote to the Ephesians: "Be ye kind one to another; merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you in Christ" (Ephes. iv, 32). And in his letter to the Colossians: "Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against another; even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so do you also" (Col. iii, 13). It is well for us to remember how God forgives those who offend Him, when they return to Him with a penitent heart. He wipes out the offense committed against Him. "I will," He says, "not remember all his iniquities that he hath done" (Ezech. xviii, 23). From this you may learn, my dear Christians, how we should forgive and forget insults and offenses that may be committed against us. We must retain no memory of them and banish all desire to be revenged.

Those who only pretend to forgive, who appear friendly toward their enemies, but who in their hearts harbor malice and enmity toward them, and who only await an opportunity to avenge themselves, should recall the words found in the book of Isaiah: "He that seeketh to revenge himself, shall find vengeance from the Lord, and He will surely keep his sins in remembrance. Forgive thy neighbor if he hath hurt thee; and then shall thy sin be forgiven to thee when thou prayest. Man to man reserve thy anger, and doth he seek remedy of God? He hath no mercy on a man like himself, and doth he outstep for his sin? He that is bold, nourisheth anger, and doth he ask forgiveness of God? Who shall obtain pardon for his sins? (Eccles. xxvii, 1-5), and the words of the Gospel: "But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses" (Matt. vi, 15). St. James tells them: "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy" (James ii, 13). And, indeed, how may anyone demand the mercy which he himself refuses to others? Christ taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," and these words we often recite in our prayers; if, however, our heart is filled with rancor toward our brethren, we condemn ourselves in these very words, because we ask God to deal with us as we deal with our neighbors. It is plain that if we do not forgive our enemies, but, on the contrary, seek to avenge ourselves, we can not hope to be forgiven, but we may expect to be severely dealt with by God as we deal with our neighbors. St. Peter tells us: "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one on another, being lovers of the brotherhood, merciful, modest, humble; not rendering evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; for unto this are you called, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter iii, 8-9).

2. It is not even sufficient to banish from heart and mind all malice and desire for revenge. We must also manifest by our actions that we have really forgiven, we must greet the offender and not friendly toward him; we must show by our manner that we consider him our friend and not our enemy. This, no doubt, is difficult for many. They will say: "If I speak freely my adversary will feel as though he got the better of me, and will consider my advance as a confession of having been in the wrong." What does it matter if he does think or speak that way? It does not tend to his honor, but to yours, if you follow in the footsteps of our Saviour, by speaking first to your enemy and by returning good for evil. "The patient man," says Solomon, "is better than the valiant, and he that taketh cities" (Prov. xvi, 32).

3. For perfect forgiveness it is demanded, finally, that we make restitution if we have injured our neighbor's character or property. If you, my dear Christians, have ever injured your neighbor you must make restitution. If you have slandered his character or name, you must make all possible efforts to restore his good name and character. If you have injured his property, you must also make restitution to the extent of his loss. "The sin will not be forgiven," says St. Augustine, "if we do not make restitution."

This, my dear Christians, is the manner of true forgiveness. We must heartily forgive our neighbor, act friendly toward him, and make restitution for any harm we have done to him. Let me close with the beautiful words of the Apostle: "Be ye kind one to another; merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you in Christ." Amen.

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TWENTIETH CENTURY MIRACLES

In an age when the opinion is prevalent that science can explain everything, the possibility of a miracle taking place is treated with the utmost scorn. Real scientists, who know the nature and the extent of their own ignorance of what is back of phenomena, don't share the vulgar confidence that what are called "the laws of nature" are eternally immutable. They hold their judgment in suspense whilst they seek to fathom the cause whenever these laws are superseded by what is ordinarily known as a miracle. A writer in the Glasgow Herald, who evidently is not a Catholic, lays before the hard-headed Scotch readers of that paper an account of the miracles he himself has witnessed in our days. He invites us readers to go with him in imagination to Lourdes, the Lourdes railway station and notice the hotel tents encamping the poorest-looking applicants to the Grotto of the Virgin. Are they not wonderfully well dressed for hotel tents? They are elegantly dressed compared with this "equal and opposite helplessness" that they escort with every sign of solicitous attention. Curious, is it not, this elegance of the hotel agents, this Beau-Brummelism of the porter?

But those who are rendering this service to the unfortunate are not ordinary mercenaries who are actuated solely by a desire of earning stipulated wages. They are influenced by quite different motives, and this explains the tender and unselfish attitude they display for their charge. We shall let the writer of the Glasgow Herald tell who they are: "But I will tell you a secret. That young man rolling the paralyzed woman along in a barrow is the young Duke of Larochefoucauld-Dondourville; his cousin, the Marquis de Massa, is attending to an epileptic who has had a fit in the railway station, and the lodgers to which they are talking these two cases are kept by the sister of the Prince de Sagan, who charges fivepence (ten cents) a day for board and lodging. Thus do these young French noblemen and their ladies lay up treasures for the future in the world to come." All this is preposterous. In the twentieth century the Catholic charity that through the ages has sought in many and varied ways to alleviate human suffering.

Now for the miracle to which this Scotch writer bears testimony as an eye witness. He tells us of a poor girl, twelve years old, whose feet from her birth had been so bent and twisted that she had never been able to put them to the ground. She had come from her native village in the company of a neighbor who was bringing an epileptic son to Lourdes. Here is the picture we have of her before and after the miracle wrought in her favor. The two patients were brought to the edge of the pool, but the parents of the epileptic boy naturally had their whole attention concentrated on their own child as the priestly procession led the grotto and approached. This wretched little girl lay like a bundle of rags at the edge of the pool, for she could not stand, and was utterly exhausted with the journey and the heat of the sun. When the procession passed she was found standing up and gazing after it with a dazed yet blissful smile on her poor little face. The little contorted feet had become straight as they never had been before. They brought her her first pair of boots in Lourdes."

She previously had been examined by physicians who recognized her case as hopeless. Her instantaneous cure was registered on the book of the Grotto of Lourdes as a miracle.

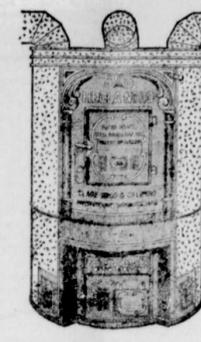
It should be noted in passing that not all cures effected at Lourdes are registered as miracles. Some of them are classified as mere suggestions, auto-suggestion and to other causes. The comment of the Scotch writer who witnessed the twentieth century miracle is well worth quoting. Here it is: "One may laugh in Glasgow, but when one stands by this pool of not very clear water and looks upon those wistful faces or turns up the extraordinary register of medically certified cures, temporary and permanent, one is bound to cry: 'Pause!'"

It would be well for those disposed to dismiss all that does not come within their rule of thumb to heed the injunction embodied in the word "pause." The well-known scientist, Dr. Bois-Reymond, an avowed materialist, in an address delivered before the Berlin Academy of Science on July 8, 1883, enumerated some of the things which science confesses itself unable to explain. He declared that it is ignorant of the nature of matter and force, the origin of motion, the origin of life, the origin of sensation and consciousness, the origin of rational thought and speech and free will.

Many persons disposed to scoff at the miracles of Lourdes have never thought of the miraculous things they themselves have never seen with their eyes nor touched with their hand, but which is constantly manifesting itself in their acts. In what manner that which is immaterial acts upon matter science, according to the speaker, does not know and never will know. "Pause" - yes, let scoffers at the Lourdes miracles pause and apply to themselves the words Hamlet addresses to Horatio: "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." - Freeman's Journal.

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