

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. J. J. BURKE

THE BIRTHDAY OF THE SAVIOUR

"For this day is born to you a Saviour Who is Christ, the Lord, in the city of David." (Luke II, 11)

My dear friends, these words of joy were spoken by the angel of the shepherds near Bethlehem 1900 years ago. As they filled the hearts of the Judean shepherds with joy long ago, so today they fill the hearts of all with gladness, love, thanksgiving and reverence.

Every nation celebrates the anniversary of the most important events in its history. The 22nd of February and the 4th of July will never be forgotten by the American people; for they are kept alive each succeeding year by a proud and grateful nation in honor of the birth of the saviour of our country and also in honor of the birth of independence in America.

Today we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Him who was the Saviour, not of one particular portion of the earth, but of the whole world. What joy, then, should fill the hearts of all "For this day is born to you a Saviour."

If we cast a glance back, and consider what the world was 1900 years ago, before the coming of Christ, and then consider what it has been since among people guided by Christian principles, then we will have some idea of our motives for rejoicing today. When Christ came, the majority of mankind was in slavery, without honor, without freedom, without hope. They were sunk into the lowest depths of immorality and crime. He taught them new doctrines concerning the duties of man to man, of the strong to the weak, of the rich to the poor, of man to woman. He inculcated the mutual duty of love and charity. He sent those who loved Him to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive and to visit the sick. He laid special stress upon the virtues of purity, meekness, humility, patience, faith and love. These doctrines of Christ were instrumental in securing the abolition of slavery, popular rights, free government, protection of children and the poor, in bringing knowledge within the reach of all and in spreading over the whole world institutions of charity.

Is it any wonder then that we rejoice today and feel that heaven is brought nearer to us? Angels are, no doubt, singing around us at this moment and assisting us to be more fervent in our acts of thanksgiving and praise. For it is a day of universal joy and the angel's message has not been received in vain.

But if it is a day of rejoicing for all, it seems to me to be in a special manner a day of rejoicing for the poor and afflicted. The poor seem to be the special favorites of Christ. He was born in poverty. He, to Whom the whole world belonged, was born in a stable, destitute of the comforts of life. His parents were poor, and His first adorners on earth were poor, hard-working, mountain shepherds. And afterwards He pointed out as one of the signs that He was the Messiah that "The poor have the Gospel preached to them." And one of the characteristic marks of His Church seems to be that it is the Church of the poor. Is not today, then, in a special manner a day of rejoicing for the poor?

When we cast our eyes on that Divine Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying on a little bunch of straw in a stable on that cold December night, can we complain any more of our poor and wretched lot? When we see that God-man suffering from cold and starvation, can we refuse to suffer and bear our trials and tribulations patiently for His sake? When we reflect on the humble and abject birth of the Son of God, shall we any longer have those proud thoughts because of our wealth, our clothing or our beauty? No. Let us practice those virtues especially taught by the Infant Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem. Let us practice the Godlike virtues of humility, poverty and mortification, and try as much as possible to imitate Him who came on earth to show us the way to heaven.

He humbled Himself by becoming man. By humility He began and completed His victory over hell. He chose as His friends and apostles the humble. And He says to His followers, "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart."

He was rich, but for our sake became poor that by His poverty we might become rich. His whole life, from the crib of Bethlehem to the cross on Calvary's heights, was one continual series of suffering and mortification endured for sinful man. Without these virtues, and especially without humility, no progress can be made on the road to heaven.

For as pride is the source of almost all sin, so humility is the foundation of all virtue. Is there not much, then, to cause us to rejoice on this day? And should it not be a day of happiness and joy to all the world?

But, although it is a day of rejoicing for all, and especially for the poor, there are some so weighed down with poverty and misery as to be unhappy. If you know of any such, try to make him happy, at least at this joyful season by relieving his wants. Those who do so may be assured that their own

THE CHRISTMAS MASS

THE LITTLE SHRINE OF MARY

The joy has come, alanna, That I watched for through the years, And my heart is full of blessing, But my eyes are full of tears. The joy has come, alanna, And I am far away. The mother will not see her boy Upon his first Mass day.

Sweet day of all my longings! Sure, why should I complain; I'd bear, to have my son a priest, A thousand years of pain. But oh, to see you with the cup In vestments gold and white, Dear Lord, this would be heaven To a poor mother's sight.

To watch you at the altar And hear you read the Book, And when you turn around to pray Observe your holy look. And oh, my child, to bow with you At this most solemn hour. When our dear Christ is present, Unto your words of power!

Some say I would not know you now, You are so changed, and asthore; Oh! I would know you, darling, If an angel's wing you wore. Little they feel a mother's love Who doubt, when face to face, That twenty years of waiting Can live in one embrace.

Now do not feel alone today, Ma bouchal stor m'chree, For Christ is more than mother And son to you and me. Sure, if I thought you'd shed a tear, It's o'er the seas I'd roam With a little shamrock and a sod To make you feel at home.

'Tis true, asthore, I'm with you, And tho' worlds should us part, My eyes would look into your eyes, My heart beats to your heart. I'm with you near the holy rail, Your kiss is on my cheek, I feel the blessing of your hand, I hear you laugh and speak.

Oh, da-ling, were I nearer, I think my heart would break; Such blessedness steals o'er me now And rapture for your sake. Enough, enough, to breathe my name When Christ is in your hand— Oh! don't forget your father's grave And poor old Ireland.

The morn is come, alanna, And I'm kneeling where you knew The little shrine of Mary Used to smile on me and you. I've placed the flowers and candles For the Mass that might have been, But my eyes, agra, can't find their rest.

My joy is all within. I'll make my heart your altar And my breast a house of prayer, Will tabernacle there. I'll wait for you at morning, And I'll pray with you till noon, And every eve I'll dream of you, My own Soggarth aroon.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

"'Tis the night before Christmas"— I whisper the rhyme, And wander in fancy To "once upon a time." I see the big fireplace, The girls and the boys, The long, heaped-up stockings, The drums and the toys.

"'Tis the night before Christmas"— So old, and so new! With all its dreamings So good and so true. I see all the faces, Forgotten so long, And out of the twilight There murmurs a song.

"'Tis the night before Christmas"— And here by my grate, The past rises, glowing; The years lose their weight; The boy-days come trooping At memory's call, And gleam in the embers That flicker and fall.

"'Tis the night before Christmas"— Ah, could I but clutch The gold of my fancies! 'T would go at my touch! The shouts and the laughter, Now sweet to my ear, Would shrink to a silence Too deep and too dear.

"'Tis the night before Christmas"— Remembrances stir As sweet as the cherished Frankincense and myrrh. And hark! As the visions Grow dim to the sight, There comes: "Merry Christmas! And, hwy-days, good-night."

W. L. B. D. N. B. B.

A CHRISTMAS WISH

Wherever there is sickness, May Santa Claus bring health; Wherever there is poverty, May Santa Claus bring wealth; Wherever one is weeping, May tears to smiles give way; Wherever sadness hovers, May joy come Christmas day.

To every heart that's aching, May peace and comfort come, And may an outlook rosy Supplant even outlook glum; May friends now separated Soon reunited be, And everyone find gladness Upon this Christmas tree.

—EDGAR GUEST

THE CHURCHES' GREAT WEAKNESS

MINISTER DEPLORES LACK OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In the Public Ledger, a secular daily of Philadelphia, appeared a timely article last Monday on the necessity of religious education for children. The article was written by Rev. A. Percival Hodgson, pastor of the Cheltenham Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church and was as follows:

"What is the greatest weakness of the Church? Undoubtedly it is the neglect of religious training of children. First, there is home neglect, God admonishes Christian parents, through Paul, as follows: 'Ye fathers, bring up your children in the fear and nurture of the Lord.'"

"There is a lamentable lack of parental co-operation. Many thoughtless parents say that because their children do not comprehend the mysteries of God and His Kingdom they should not be urged to unite with the Church or observe its usages.

"That objection is aimed at every law of progress. Because your child does not understand the mysteries of higher mathematics, will you excuse him from learning the multiplication table? We receive larger light by moving toward the light. We grow by using the knowledge we possess. 'Use or lose' is the eternal law of the universe.

"Others say that young people should be left to form their own opinions of religion, particular doctrine and methods of worship without being prejudiced in its favor while they are children. Do not parents prejudice their children in favor of securing an education? They do not seek to prejudice their minds toward that which is moral? Then why not prejudice them in favor of salvation—though Jesus Christ?"

"Besides, it is unscientific and contrary to the laws of psychology and experience to hold that youth will grow up unprejudiced. If the field is neglected, it will be cursed with a crop of weeds. If youth is not prejudiced toward the good it will be prejudiced toward the bad."

"It is far better to guard the soil that only good seed shall be sown in it. It is saner to claim youth for the Church than to try to reclaim men when they have wasted their substance in the far country."

"It is the business of the Church to keep the children where Christ put them, 'in the midst,' not in the mist. Then we will have no need for the old hymn, 'Where is My Wandering Boy Tonight?'"

"We are not justified in allowing the children to grow up imagining that the way into the Kingdom of God is through the far country. 'We should stress the preservation rather than the rescue of the child. We baptize our children and then, for the most part, thrust them out into the world and regard them as corrupt and alien from God. After waiting until they were in open rebellion we undertake, by the employment of some extraordinary method to bring them back into the kingdom."

"Then the time comes when the child must accept membership in the kingdom of his own volition. And that is the critical period. That is when the divinely appointed guardianship of the Church must be exercised with discretion. The thing against which I want to utter emphatic protest is the false notion that we are to rescue the child. The child does not need to be brought back; we should keep him in the kingdom. The great responsibility is not the rescue, but the preservation of the child."

The church must recognize the religious rights of the child, 'of such is the kingdom of heaven.' The Church owes it to the child to protect him in the full exercise of his divine birthright, for did not Christ say, 'Except ye become as this little child ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven?'"

THE EDITOR COMMENTS ON THE SAME

F. W. Norcorer the "Church Editor" of the paper, and a non-Catholic, adds the following statement to the minister's remarks:

"Religious instruction appears to be the scarcest thing in the world. Both child and adult receive all sorts of instruction and advice ad infinitum, but actual authoritative teaching of God's law is neglected apparently from the cradle to the grave."

"Probably this is not true of the Roman Catholic Church, but it certainly applies to many Protestant communities. 'Every church has a Sunday school, but there is not time in that brief afternoon hour for real religious instruction. Religion is barred from the Public schools. It is rarely or never mentioned by parents in the home, and it should not be surprising that we are raising up a generation of men and women who are 'boneheads' when it comes to knowledge of God and His laws. Incidentally, they are slaves of pleasure, and many of them develop into very bad citizens."

"The Catholic Church understands the value of giving religious instruction to the child. It acts on the principle that if religion is ground into the plastic mind in the years of childhood, it will never be forgotten in after years. And the principle is correct."

"Among Protestant bodies, perhaps the staunchest religionists are the hardy Scotch and their descend-

ants. Why? Because in Scotland more of them received more religion than food in their early years, and the fear of God never gets out of their hearts."

"Many of America's most successful business men and church leaders have descended from that stock."

"All of which seems to be an excellent argument for religious day schools. The child doesn't get religion in Public school; he doesn't get it in the home; he gets only a thin veneer of it in the Sunday school."

"Crime and lawlessness thrive among irreligious men and women. This may be the underlying reason for the crime wave that is gripping the world today."—The Tablet.

CHILDREN, SACRIFICE AND PROGRESS

Some there are who regard children as a misfortune, and some reckon them a liability, not an asset. Happily few of these people are found in the Catholic Church. The spirit of our people is well exemplified in a fine passage from the late Canon Sheehan's "The Intellectuals."

A few days ago I met a poor woman, a tinker's wife, just outside the town. She had a brood of healthy, handsome, dirty children around her. The youngest who was particularly smutty . . . was in her arms. "You must find it hard to find bread for all these?" I said.

"Wisha, begor, that's true for your Reverence," she replied, "and the times is bad. I have too many of 'em, but sure God sent 'em." "Wouldn't it be a great relief now," I said, "to get rid of the responsibility of so many children? I can get the little girl into an orphanage, and one of the boys." Her face fell. She moved away. I could see she was not pleased. "Come now," I said, "you have too many children. What would you take now for that dirty little beggar in your arms?"

"Not all the money in the Bank of Ireland; nor all the gold in the Queen's crown," she said. "Would I, Jemmy, alanna?" etc. That woman was poor, yet richer than all the banks in the world.

And without riches of this sort, the world cannot exist, at least not in a civilized state. Next to religion, indeed vitally connected with it, the most important thing in this world is mother-love. The birth-controllers are doing their best, not consciously, perhaps, but none the less earnestly, to destroy it.

In its place, they claim, they will supply economic sufficiency. Never did Satan concoct a lie more stupid. No nation lifts its people to economic sufficiency by first inducing them to destroy a social factor of incalculable value, and then by training them to seek pleasure and shirk duty. No individual ever achieved independence except through sacrifice. The birth-controllers would destroy their best, too. The love that is the heart of a mother, with its tenderness, its pity, its sacrifice, its absolute selflessness, they try to set aside, replacing by methods which would not be countenanced on a respectable stock-farm. For sacrifice of any kind is abhorrent to the soft, flabby, shirking perversion which is their nature."

When the omnipotent and all-loving God strove to make men understand what He meant when He said that He loved them, He compared his love to the love of a mother for her child. God they could not understand. But any man, not made utterly inhuman through sin, can understand what is meant by a mother's love. That beautiful ideal likewise the birth-controllers destroy. To say that they debase men and women to the level of the brute is unjust to the brute. A brute has neither intelli-

gence nor free will; he is not made, as man is made in the image of God; he has no duties, no obligations, no nature which he can defile. He has instincts, and by them he is governed. He is incapable of sin against God or against himself. But man has intelligence, free will; he is made in God's image; he has duties which he can neglect, obligations which he can break, a nature which he can defile. He is capable of sin against God, against his nature, and against society; and birth-controllers would have him believe that sin against all three is the road to personal perfection and the perfection of society. This is not bestiality, but worse. It is the denial of man's intellectual nature, the decay of society, and the defiance of God and of the law which an all-wise Creator has implanted in man's very being.—America.

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