

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

TEMPTATION

"To be tempted by the devil." (Matt. iv. 1.)

To show us, my dear brethren, that no man dare expect to escape temptation in this life our Blessed Lord even allowed Himself to be tempted by the devil. The daring of the Evil One to approach our Lord!

Then why are we tempted? Why is our life to be a struggle and a warfare? First, that we may know ourselves, our weaknesses, our proneness to sin. And the more we know this the more humble we shall be, and humility is the safeguard to our souls. Yet no subtle is the devil that may a time men fancy that he has forgotten them; that they have been good so long that they are safe; that any suggestion of evil would be repelled by them for sure. Beware of such thoughts. This is not the sign of sanctity. "Those who are leading a heavenly life on earth are all the chief objects of the assaults of Satan. Against them he harbours bitterest hatred; for them he is each moment laying snares." (Council of Trent.) On the other hand, those who do not feel the assaults of temptation should be humble and fearful. "They possess neither piety, nor charity, nor any virtue worthy of a Christian man, and are hence entirely in the power of the devil, nor need they any temptations to overthrow them." (Ibid.)

And, secondly, temptations force us to be manful and strive our best. Temptation is not a sin; it is the yielding that is the crime. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation" (Jas. i. 12), who stands on his guard, vigilant, facing the enemy. Is not this life given to us in which to earn eternal life by being humble, striving, faithful to our Master? "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," says St. Paul.

As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render me." (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.)

Yes, St. Paul won the victory, but there are not many heroes like St. Paul. True my dear brethren, and it is only natural for us to wonder, have we a chance of overcoming our enemies? Their power is great, their courage undaunted, their hatred of us enormous and unmeasured; they wage against us a perpetual war, so that with them there can be no peace, no truce. The devil tempts us to deceive us and precipitate us to ruin. At one time, stimulating us from within, he employs the affections of the soul; at another, assailing us from without, he makes use of external things, of prosperity, to puff us up with pride, or of adversity to break our spirits." (Council of Trent.)

Appalling is this picture of the enemies that we have to fight against, the constant temptations that we must endure. But remember and take heart from this—we are not alone in the conflict. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly from temptation." (2 Pet. ii. 9.) And St. Paul prays: "The God of grace crush Satan under your feet speedily." (Rom. xvi. 20.) Ah! if God is with us, we know how to obtain strength from Him to resist "the most wicked one."

Humbly we must distrust ourselves, and have all confidence in God. "Let no one presumptuously exalt himself, so as to expect to be able by his own strength to overcome hostile temptations and assaults of the demons. That is not within the power of human frailty. The strength is from God, by Whose guidance and assistance alone we are able to conquer." (Council of Trent.)

And we can obtain this assistance from our Blessed Lord by humble earnest prayer. "For we have not a High Priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin. Let us go, then, with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid." (Heb. iv. 15, 16.) The devil is afraid of humble prayer. It is the weapon forged against him that God has put into our hands wherewith to resist him. And we have to pray that we yield not to temptation deceived by the wicked one. That is one of his most successful wiles, deceiving us. Has he not appeared to the Saints even as an angel of light, trying to deceive them when every other assault had been in vain? So let us be humble and afraid lest we be deceived. It is not skill or learning will safeguard us, but humble prayer. "The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy protection. The Lord keepeth thee from evil; may the Lord keep thy soul." (Ps. cxx. 5, 7.)

And besides the danger of being deceived there is the chance of being worsted in the fight, wearied out, wounded, lying at the mercy of our enemy. So, again, we have to pray for strength "that the grace of God may be at hand to refresh and vigourate us on the evil day when our own strength may fail. And as long as we pray and as often as we pray this strength will never fail us." (Council of Trent.)

Be not dismayed at this picture of our life on earth—one long struggle with the tempter. "Fear none of those things that thou shalt suffer," says St. John. (Apoc. ii. 10.) He bids us think of the victory and the crown of glory, and that thought will give us courage to persevere. May we overcome temptations day after day, and then the rewards are ours. "He that shall overcome . . . I

will confess his name before My Father and before His Angels." (Apoc. iii. 5.) "To him that shall overcome I will grant to sit with Me in My throne." (Apoc. v. 12.) "He that shall overcome . . . I will be his God; and he shall be My son." (Apoc. xxi. 7.)

ON THE ROAD TO UNITY

The briefest study of the proposed American Church brings us face to face with its fundamental ideal, the unity of all religious bodies and of all American citizens in one great Church. Its propagators are striving to fulfill the desire of Christ that there be but one Fold.

The Catholic will find it hard to understand how Protestants—and the leading propagators of the new Church are Protestants—can fail to see that the new ideal is a frank admission that for four centuries Protestantism has labored in vain. The chaos and discord of the sects is not an accident. It is the logical, inevitable working out of the fundamental Protestant principle, the right of the individual to interpret religious creeds and religious experiences for himself. Protestantism was established with this as a basic principle; it has fought valiantly for that principle during the course of its existence. The result has been the pitiful division of Protestantism first into sects, then into reformed sects, and finally into reformed, reformed sects, and a loose jointure among the members of the single sects, who float with casual unconcern from one Church to another. Now, at the end of four centuries, Protestantism finds that it must, if it desires to be effective, return to the unity which it so scathingly repudiated when it broke away from the center of union.

During those centuries when the principle of private interpretation was cutting Protestantism into smaller and smaller segments, the sects kept drifting ever farther apart. They agreed in one thing, their repudiation of Catholicism, the only abiding principle of religious unity; they disagreed on almost every conceivable point of doctrine and practice. It is consequently, no small task at this late day to bring some sort of unity out of Churches which have little common in belief, worship, or form of government. Prescinding altogether from the difficulties of uniting Catholicism with Protestantism, or the still greater difficulties of uniting the various Protestant religious unity that will unite believers and unbelievers, men of one tinture of creed whatsoever, they will find that the mere task of bringing unity out of the thousand and one Protestant creeds is something to tax the most sanguine dreamer of dreams.

Disunion among the sects does not begin and end in the fact that their members occupy different buildings, Sunday, it involves questions of belief and methods of worship which, whether they trace back their origin to the days of the catacombs or are a thing of yesterday's sprouting are still bone and blood of the sect that teaches them.

Before, then, there can be any thought of unity even among Protestants, the fathers of the new Church must be ready to usher in the Presbyterianism with his relentless creed of predestination and the Episcopalian who holds predestination in abhorrence; the Unitarian who rejects the Trinity and the Methodist who still builds Trinity churches. In kaleidoscopic succession the pulpits of the new Church must be held by ministers who hold the Divinity of Christ with all the tremendous consequences of that belief and by ministers who believe Christ merely the highest type of man. Protestant Episcopal incense and vestment must be made to blend with Presbyterian rigorous simplicity. Baptism must be an essential or an accidental of the new Church, a sacrament for children or one for adults depending entirely on what the individual chooses to hold.

There is only one other alternative: each sect must be asked to give up its individual beliefs and forms of worship and merge itself in a common belief and practice. The choice is clear: either the sects must be united in such a way as to preserve what for centuries they have cherished, or a scheme must be found of persuading them to lay aside their beliefs, to accept the creed which will be laid down as essential to the new American Church. Here would seem to be a difficulty that ought to terrify the most optimistic.

The difficulty is not, however, to the fathers of the new American Church, nearly so insurmountable as it would appear. The very first characteristic of the new Church is built up to meet and solve precisely this difficulty. Dr. Everett A. Miller, writing in the Zion Herald to plead for unity, waives this aside as no real difficulty at all.

"Denominational differences," he declares, "are only epidemic; our roots are all set in the same soil. To allow forms and ceremonies, traditions and politics, to keep Christians asunder is a colossal blunder."

The attitude here struck is typical of the propagators of the new unity. At heart, all Christian sects are the same; disunion is all on the surface. Our American Church will include only the essentials, leaving what is non-essential to individual interpretation. Thus by a single stroke of the pen, do we attain to unity with-

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out losing the individuality dear to the sects.

If the difficulty were as paltrily easy as Dr. Miller and his confreres imply, the vain efforts time out of mind to unite even small religious bodies would be quite inexplicable. But his statement on closer examination proves to be mere misty platitudes without foundation in anything more solid than an irresponsibility good-will and an incurable idealism.

Denominational differences are only epidemic. Skin diseases, it might be noted in passing are among the few non-fatal maladies that continue to baffle the medical world. A surgeon who, with scarcely an effort, will cure a ruptured appendix or remove troublesome gall stones, stands helplessly before a growing youth's pimply skin.

But just how much on the surface are these differences between the sects? If every shade of doctrine, every religious variant possible, is not taught by Protestant Churches, then the general public has been vastly misled. One may be a Protestant and believe in personal merit or reject it, accept the Providence of God or question it, defend the authenticity and infallibility of the Scriptures or class them as myth, poetry, history, or lies. Why, it is even possible for a Protestant seminary to step from a psychology classroom at Harvard, where they teach him there are no such things as individual souls and immortality straight into a pulpit erected for the salvation of individual, immortal spirits. One wonders with Marshall, after even a brief acquaintance with modern Protestant thought, whether it would be considered heresy nowadays for a minister to question the existence of God.

The only way to speak of these differences as epidemic is by admitting that the Protestant sects are singularly thick-skinned. The fact is, however, that they strike deep down into the very roots in such a way as to affect inevitably the whole course of life of one who has not come to separate belief from practice. A man who believes in personal responsibility for sin cannot logically follow the same path as one who holds that he is predestined to heaven or to hell. The man who accepts the Bible as God's inspired Word must act in accord with the law it contains; the man who rejects its inspiration is no more influenced by it than he would be by Epictetus or Machiavelli or Sartre Resnais.

Differences like these, and I have barely touched the octaves from lowest base to highest treble of Protestant belief, are not to be swept away by the ledgerman of an optimistic smile and plausible words. Far less is the Catholic to be persuaded that the doctrines of his Church are after all non-essential and of trifling import. Unity is precious, but not nearly so precious in the eyes of a right thinking man as truth. And if, to attain an untied, doubtful unity, he must now treat what he holds to be essential truth as accidental and of slight moment, he is more than likely to hesitate long before entering the new American Church.

At best, the new American Church can leave each of the churches its own individual doctrine, while a Church it teaches absolutely nothing on any of what Dr. Miller has called accidental, epidemic dogmas. To obtain even a sort of unity, it must confine its teaching strictly to what Protestants call essentials in belief. It may be interesting in my next paper to notice just what is essential in the belief to be held by the new American Church.—Daniel A. Lord, S. J., in America.

A GOOD THING TO STOP

A good subject for a Lenten resolution is the giving up of mean backbiting and gossip. It is a wretched practice, and it is astonishing how it clings, even to frequent communicants. It is altogether too lightly regarded; for it is an unjust, and is a most irritating, and even destructive thing in human society. It is hard to see how an habitual backbiter can be looked on as a good, or even as a good-natured, person. There is certainly no much brotherly love in a heart which finds pleasure in observing and reciting the faults of others. And however one may feel at the beginning of such a prac-

tice, those who persist in it come at last, not merely to take pleasure in stating and denouncing the faults of their neighbor, but in finding out that he has faults; for fresh faults in somebody must be found if one's propensity to criticize is to be gratified. Consequently, the backbiter, however careful when he begins, comes soon to making rash judgments. To some at last, more suspicion comes to look like certainty; and they so treat it. It is no uncommon thing to hear people who do not at all suspect,—though perhaps they ought to,—how grossly unjust they are, give voice to positive statements as of proven fact, without anything to fall back on, if they are sharply questioned, but some hasty suspicion, some most unfair and arbitrary interpretation of word or action. There are people who would reject with horror the idea of taking five cents from another without being very clear that person owed it, who cheerfully take other people's characters from them on only the dimmest of suspicions; suspicions indeed which, in only too many cases they welcome for the chance afforded to wag their uncharitable tongues. It is seldom that a real love for the right and a real hatred of the wrong are at the back of such conduct. The desire to appear better than others—strong, though often unconscious,—is perhaps the most common motive of backbiting and detraction. Holier than thou is still a popular attitude. There is also the desire for a petty sensation; the mean impulse of being the bearer of ill-nature, or even of rumour; the wretched feeling which gives pleasure even to the telling of death tidings; not pleasure in death, but pleasure in the importance of being a news-bearer. There is a certain satisfaction in reading of a great shipwreck; not because we are glad of the shipwreck, but because, it makes us feel good to be safe. There was an ancient Greek who said it was delightful to sit on the shore and see a drowning man struggling for life in the waves. Ordinary people don't go that far. They are sorry enough to see any one drown; but there is a certain pleasure in telling of it and in dwelling on its horrors which we feel because we have escaped where another went down. A similar feeling, we suppose, is back of some detraction and backbiting. Consciously or unconsciously, we feel better because another has gone down in the waves whilst we sat safe on the shore. But be the motive what they may, the practice is a mean and bad one. There is not a touch of good anywhere about it. Well, a good thing to give up in Lent, not merely for Lent, but for keeps; for good and all.—The Casket.

CHEERFULNESS

Have you ever, by any chance, remarked the imperturbable good humor of one-legged men? Have you ever noticed that a cripple is almost always smiling? Did it ever occur to you that the woman with a houseful of lusty, yelling children is the merriest woman in the neighborhood? Nature's paradoxes. It would seem that when that old scoundrel Trouble, smites a citizen with frequent and unsparring blows, he somehow manages to hit his victim's funnybone and the victim laughs at him.

Take a walk through any city. Pay your respects to the civic magazines. You will find them all as solemn as undertakers at a funeral; their digits weighs them down like a leaden cloak. If you have sufficient influence to obtain an interview with the people who guard themselves as burdened with the responsibilities of the locality it will not escape you that their smiles are much like the reflections of candle light on coffin-plates. Study the features of the passers by, the well-to-do folk. Gloomy humans as a general rule.

Not the majority have much reason for tears. Their vexations, one may venture, are of the vegetable or garden variety. One has had a quarrel with his wife and is still fighting it out alone when his better half has no opportunity to make objections. A woman has failed to match a piece of silk in two or three stores and has come to the conclusion that men and women are unfeeling brutes. A third individual is planning how to get the better of a rival and of course is deadly serious. A grumpy lot.

Wend your way to the poorer quarter of the town, to the section where expenses are always out of breath from a stern chase after fleet footed income, where entire families manage to exist in two or three close rented rooms, where the street department never mends the pavements, where fresh air is all but unknown and the variety of odors puts the Colro to shame. I mean a district where the all-important question is not Prohibition or the result of the Peace Conference, but: "Where is tomorrow's dinner coming from?" In that neighborhood you will find that through the medium of some benevolent necromancy past all analysis the poor, the afflicted t e down-trodden have the "Open Season" to joy.

When Lincoln said that the Lord must love the common people because He made so many of them, he knew whereof he spoke. Lincoln belonged to that great aristocracy that snobs call the "common people." He lived cheek by jowl with gaunt poverty and hard work all the years he was growing up and realized from first-hand experience that the poor get the most out of life after all. This is one of the reasons that Lin-

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coln, along with his other great claims to fame, has come down through history as a teller of stories that still make men weep from laughter. He gathered that fund of fun in his starved boyhood.

To take a leaf out of Chesterton, the trouble with most prosperous people is that they haven't trouble enough to keep their natures from curdling. The rich are always discontented. Stand on Tremont Street some afternoon and survey the faces of the women who occupy the most sumptuous limousines. You will seldom see a happy face in those costly vehicles. Those women are disgusted with life; they are suffering from surfeit. By way of contrast glimpse the frankly vulgar crowd that threatens every moment to burst the sides of some ancient and battered Ford. They have no dignity to worry about or money to make them anxious or style to maintain. They are just "people" having a good time, living the simple life without knowing it and enjoying everything with the unquenchable zest of children. Yet they give more than they receive; they are the true philanthropists, adding unconsciously to the great sum total of healthy innocent merriment.

You will notice in the accounts from overseas that all the nurses and workers in the European hospitals where our wounded soldiers have suffered after terrific battles tell the same story; that the stricken man never complain, no matter how badly war has battered them. Mere boys who are sightless and know that henceforth they will walk in the dark, young men who have lost arms and legs or have been pieced together by the marvellous skill of the surgeon—they are all cheerful. Assuredly they have full right to claim melancholy for their own. But they don't. Not a bit of it.

Isn't it enough to make us ashamed of ourselves that we went moaning about because sugar was scarce or bread was bruttette when we think that all these months these young defenders of ours not only fought for us, but that thousands died and thousands of others are coming back maimed and all but helpless? Shrivelled from poison gas, torn and hacked by sharpnel and the surgeon's knife they were cheerful and we complained. And now they come back smiling. Can any man or woman talk about losing faith in human nature after reflecting on such things as these?

There is a man who sits all day long and far into the night in a little cart on Washington Street and sells papers. Both his legs are gone. Once in a while on a cold night

I have stopped at his cart, bought a paper or two and inquired how things were going with him. According to his version things were always going well. He is always cheerful, perhaps the cheeriest soul on that much abused thoroughfare. It has always made me smile to look at the scowling and self absorbed crowds hurrying on with their collars high about their discontented necks and then to glance back at that little cripple sitting still in the cold and apparently quite contented with life.

The world needs cheerful people whatever the recipe by which they arrive at the desired result. There will never be too many of them. Of these it can be said as of any trolley car, however crowded: "There is plenty of room."—A Looker-on in Boston Pilot.

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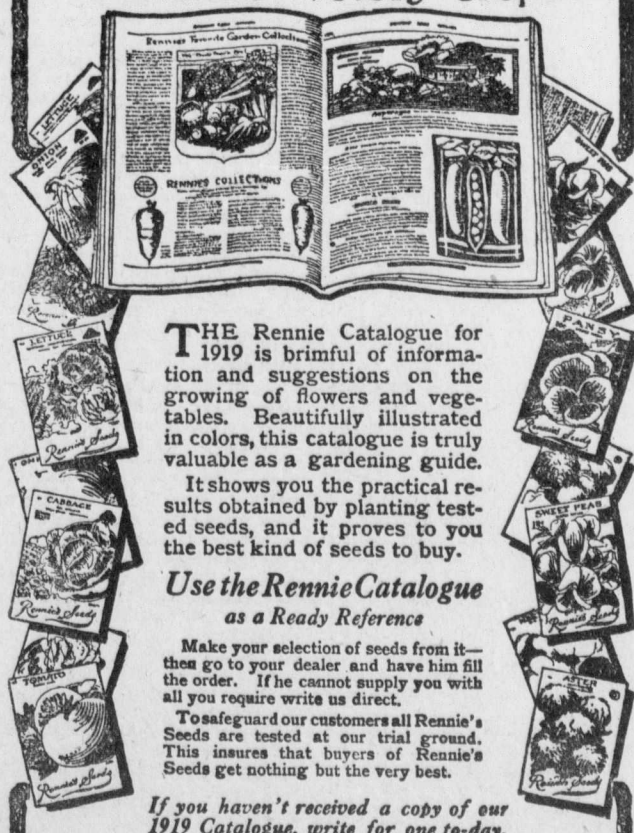
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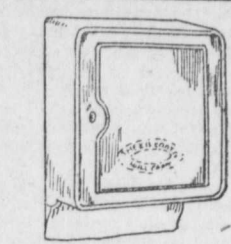
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