

## FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. M. BOSSAERT

## DEVOTION TO THE DEAD

"He that is a friend loved at all times, and a brother is proved in distress." (Prov. xvi. 17)

There are several misconceptions widely prevalent concerning devotion to the souls in Purgatory. It is often regarded as a recent devotion sprung up in these latter days, as May being the month of Mary. Again, it is regarded as the devotion for nuns and women and children, as if men had something more important to remember and trouble about. And, lastly, there are those who speak slightly about Purgatory, and who declare that they will only be too satisfied if they ever get there! Let us find answers to all this from the Saints of the early ages and the days of faith — Saints who compel attention and respect from the names they bear as doctores and illustrious writers of the Church.

In all the most ancient forms of Mass express mention is made of prayer and sacrifice for the dead. Tertullian declares that the custom came down from Apostolic times. St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his "Instructions" says: "We pray for all among us who are departed this life, believing that this will be the greatest relief to them, for whom it is made, whilst the holy and tremendous Virgin lies present."

St. John Chrysostom also says: "To pray for the faithful departed in the tremendous mysteries was decreed by the Apostles." St. Ambrose preaching at the funeral of the Emperor Theodosius — whom once he had rebuked and denounced and who had repented — says: "I loved him, and therefore I follow him into the country of the living. Neither will I forsake him till by tears and prayers I shall bring the man whither his merits call him, unto the holy mountain of the Lord." Again, the same Saint preaching on Valentinian the younger: "Give the Holy Mystery to the dead. Let us, with pious earnestness, beg release for his soul. Lift up your hands with me, that at least by this duty we may make some return for his benefits. No day shall pass you over in silence, no prayer of mine shall ever be closed without you. You shall have a share in all my sacrifices."

St. Augustine writes: "Nor is it to be denied that the souls of the departed are relieved by the piety of their living friends, when the sacrifice of the Mediator is offered for them, or alms are given in the Church." But St. Augustine did more than write or preach about it: we know how lovingly he fulfilled the duty. St. Monica, his mother, when dying said to him: "Lay this body anywhere; be not concerned about that. The only thing I ask is that you make remembrance of me at the altar of the Lord wherever you are." At her burial, the sacrifice of our ransom was offered for her. "I pray for the sins of my mother," he writes; "hear me by the remedy of our wounds, Who hung on the Cross and sitting on the right hand, intercede for us. . . . Forgive her, forgive her, I beseech Thee, Who hast promised mercy to the merciful" ("Confessions," lib. 9, c. 13).

Morg powerful, indeed, than their words are the examples of the Saints; and coming down from these remote ages to the glorious monastic time of Cluny and Cîteaux, let us seek proofs there for devotion to the souls in Purgatory.

St. Odilo, Abbot of Cluny, in the year 998, was moved by God's grace to institute in his monastery the commemoration of "All Souls." It seemed so natural to him that celebrating one day "All Saints," that the next day prayer should be made "for All Souls" waiting and longing to join the Saints in heaven; and whose hour of bliss could be so accelerated by the prayers, Communion, and Masses of the devout. "All Souls' Day" soon was known and adopted from abbey to abbey, from cathedral to parish churches, till shortly the voice of Rome spoke, and it became the universal practice of the Church. From Odilo's love and pity for the suffering souls, what a harvest for nine hundred years, of graces and blessings has been gathered by the Church for its poor children in Purgatory!

St. Bernard likewise gives us an example of devotion to the dead, and how pleasing it was to God. After his mother's death, he resolved daily to recite seven Psalms for the repose of her soul. He was only young then, but he persevered for a time. One night, however, wearied and somewhat remiss, he omitted the prayers for his mother. Next day the Abbot St. Stephen called him and asked: "Whom did you commission yesterday to say the prayers for your mother?" God had revealed the neglect of his pious practice to his superior! For absolutely no one knew either of his practice or its neglect. How pleasing to God, then, are prayers for the departed, that a miracle should be worked to warn Bernard lest he should grow careless! This rebuke was never forgotten, and throughout his life St. Bernard was a devoted and zealous friend of the souls of the faithful departed.

A little boy gives us another lesson on this same subject. Peter Dunsan was left an orphan at an early age, and one of his brothers gave him a home, if a home it could be called, for his biographer tells us that Peter was treated not like a slave, but as a beast! As soon as he was able, he was sent to tend the

swine. His life was one of abject poverty and neglect. One day he found a piece of money — a silver coin. Picture what that was to such a boy! A fortune! It would seem: perhaps he had never had a penny of his own before. What pleasure would that coin represent to a half-starved, barefooted boy. And what did he do with it? A Peter took the money to the parish priest, and asked him to say Mass for his father's soul! That simple fact gives two things: First, that in those days the poor were instructed about Purgatory, for Peter must have heard of it on Sundays in the church, and, secondly, that the poor then, as now, love to have souls for their dear departed ones. We cannot say that his fame and sanctity had this act of charity and self-denial for its foundation; but it is consoling to remember that the first thing we learn of the great Benedictine monk, St. Peter Dunsan, Cardinal and Archbishop, was that, even as a boy in dire poverty, he gave his all for a Mass for the dead.

Let us reverence, then, this devotion of prayers for the dead, as one of the earliest and even apostolic practices of the Church; to reverence it as favoured by the lives of the greatest Saints; and as a practice that will obtain mercy for us, because we ourselves have been merciful to others.

A last word to those who speak lightly of Purgatory. This is no new thing; and we find such men rebuked many hundred years ago. St. Cyprian of Arles, who died in 258, speaks of such. "A person may say, I am not much concerned how long I remain in Purgatory, provided I may come to eternal life. Let no one reason thus. The fire of Purgatory will be more dreadful than whatever torments can be seen, imagined, or endured in this world. And how does anyone know whether he will stay days, months, or years? He who is afraid now to put his finger into the fire, does he not fear lest he be then all buried in torments for a long time?" And Venanzio Beda answers: "The fire of Purgatory will be more intolerable than all the torments that can be felt in this life." And St. Augustine writes: "Those souls suffer by wonderful but real ways more than our imagination can represent."

Alas! those who think little of Purgatory now will realize its punishments when it is too late. As they despised it in life, and as they neglected to show mercy to others, when they were on earth, it will come home to them when they are helpless there "that a hard heart shall fare evil at the last." (Eccles. xiii. 27.)

"ADORATION OF THE LAMB" RESTORED TO BELGIUM

(By N. C. W. C. News Service)

Belgium is rejoicing at the restoration to the Cathedral of St. Bavon, in Ghent, of the wings of the great altar-piece, "The Adoration of the Lamb," the crowning work of Hubert and Jan Van Eyck, which Germany has been compelled to yield as part of the stipulation of the treaty of Versailles. As a result the artistic world will again see the scattered panels of the Adoration, a unique monument in the history of art, united once more, for, to the twelve wings ceded by the Kaiser Frederick Museum will be added those which have been preserved in the Brussels gallery, giving the world once more a reconstruction of the masterpiece which inaugurated a new era in painting and which has been one of the enigmas of art.

"The Adoration of the Lamb" has been called by many a moral encyclopedia of the middle ages. Its scope approaches that of Dante's Divine Comedy in literature. It treats of all things in heaven and on earth and there was a predella to it, depicting hell, which disappeared in the sixteenth century. It portrays God and man in all their historical and mystical relations. It tells of the heavenly and the earthly paradise, of the ages that have followed one another in the flight of time, of the drama of the fall, of the death of Abel, of the years of expectation of those who awaited the Messiah and of the mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation. It shows the world subject to Christ; it depicts the life of the Church in her saints, her hermits, her virgins, martyrs, confessors, her princes and it shows all Christendom filled with Cathedral spires. It reaches out from the beginning to the consummation of the world and ends with a glimpse of the eternal life to come with an arrangement as orderly as that of the Divine Comedy itself.

From the point of view of the artist this monumental work has supreme interest in the fact that it unites in itself the styles and the genius of two opposing epochs, for whereas the general plan belongs to the middle ages, its execution and manner of seeing things and putting them on canvas are truly modern.

The majesty of the Gothic love of the abstract is blended with the genius for what is realistic and concrete which is typical of the Renaissance. Nature, which prior to their day, men had looked at through a veil of formulas and symbols, is, by the painters of this masterpiece, seen suddenly to be unveiled and the world of realities disclosed. If the object of the painter is to depict the visible world, if his aim ought to be not so much the expression of a thought as to hold up the mirror to life, then, according to the distinction

guished critic, Louis Gillot, for the first time in its history, painting entered into its birthright in "The Adoration of the Lamb."

Never was a richer shrine of nature and of life combined in Art. In 200 figures of every size, sex, race and costume we behold a resume of the human race. We see before us all the beauty of the physical world, the woods, the fields, the rocks, the desert places, a geography of earth with its climates and its flora, palms, aloes, and cacti. Architecture in all the varieties — towers, cupolas, statues, and bas-reliefs, is summoned to the painting. There are simple and colorful interiors such as that of the room of the Blessed Virgin, portrayed as a young Flemish maiden with prie-dieu, its neatly tiled floor, its washstand and basin and its open window looking out to the pointed roofs of a row of brick houses. There are portraits of marvelous realism, such as those of the donor, Jodocus Vyt and his wife. There are epic figures such as that of God the Father, under the guise of Charlemagne, crowned with a triple tiara, type of a Pontifical king. There are figures full of charm and poetry, such as the singing angels and others, such as those of Adam and Eve, that are fearful in their naturalism.

The twelve panels now ceded by the Kaiser Frederick Museum include "The Just Judges," "The Kights of Christ," "The Singing Angels," "The Music-Making Angels," "The Holy Hermits," "St. John the Baptist," "The Archangel Gabriel," "The Blessed Virgin," "St. John the Evangelist," and some minor panels, as well as one of the donors of the work, Jodocus Vyt and Elizabeth Borlout.

To take these panels from the Kaiser Frederick Museum was to tear its very heart out, but through the combination of the wings and the center piece again the world is the gain.

Another art work which has been ceded to Belgium by Germany under the terms of Versailles treaty is the wings of the polyptych, "The Last Supper," the central panel of which, until lately in the church of St. Pierre in Louvain, was at first believed to have been engulfed when ruin and destruction overtook the university city.

The first Protestant Regent and the first Protestant King of Scotland were both penitents of England. So much for "reformed" independence. The "reformed" Scots cast off the Pope, but not the need of appeal; they appealed to England, the "old enemy," for men and money to be used against their own lawful ruler; they got what they begged for, but they forfeited their national independence. They have none now; and certainly the Papacy cannot be blamed for there being no longer a free and independent kingdom of Scotland. The orator quoted asserted that "the Papacy repudiated the Church of Scotland in the days of Bruce. The Papacy repudiates the Church of Scotland today, but as their fathers made light of the matter, they need not allow it to bear too heavily upon them today." The Papacy did not repudiate the Church of Scotland in Bruce's day; that Church, to be accurate, was the Church of Christ in Scotland, a totally distinct and different institution from the Church, or Kirk, of Scotland today, with which the Papacy never had anything to do. Can you be referred to an instance of the Scottish clergy in Bruce's days rejecting the authority of the Pope in matters of doctrine, or on the ground of their professing a different faith? Papal authority was not rejected until 1560, and then by an Act of Parliament, which abolished also under most severe penalties the Mass and other doctrines believed and taught by the Church "in the days of Bruce."

The Church to which Bruce and Scotland then belonged is a Divine institution, built by Christ upon the Rock, Peter, universal, for all ages and all nations, teaching everywhere and always the same truths. "The Church of Scotland today" is a modern, human invention, limited to one nation, variable in doctrine with a creed subject to revision, and which has been described by one of its own preachers as presenting "a monstrous travesty of the Divinity." It was superfluous to state that the Papacy repudiates that Church. To suggest that the Church in the days of Bruce is the same as the Church of Scotland today is not honest. Moreover, it is very silly, for the majority of men can read, and could easily discover that if Bruce returned to Scotland now, he would want to assist at Mass, as he did before at Bannockburn. To join in singing psalms in a building without an altar would not do just as well. He would want to pray for the faithful departed, seeing that he built a chapel wherein Masses were to be offered for the soul of his friend Seton; the Church of Scotland has neither Masses for the dead nor belief in purgatory. He would want to confess to a priest, or an abbot, and would not regard a talk with an elder or even with a Moderator as just the same. He would want a confessor, and not a picture of Knox nor a copy of the Shorter Catechism would content him. Nothing of what he wanted, of what he and his forefathers and his children had until the "reformation," would he find in the Church of Scotland today. But he would find all still in the Church to which he belonged six hundred years ago, and a chilled and baffled stranger in the finest Presbyterian Kirk, he would be a son at home in the humblest Catholic chapel. If, as the orator seems to imply finally, Papal pronouncements are of no account, why all the fuss because there was not a Papal condemnation of Germany? Why the desire that the Pope should speak on the side of the Allies, and the wrath and resentment when he remained silent?

Recent developments in France indicate the changed attitude towards religion that has taken possession of the nation since the great War. The testimonies of appreciation from all quarters upon the work of the late lamented Cardinal Amette including the splendid appreciation of his war work by the ex-president of the republic, M. Poincaré, in the Revue des Deux Mondes betoken the return of France to the ideals of religion. France has passed through many crises in the past. She has even given evidence at times of becoming atheistic. But the unhappy past betrayed rather a superficial weakness, than a constitutional taint. France is Catholic by birth, by vocation, by temperament, and by heredity. And the crisis through which she has successfully passed only serves to show that France cannot be kept alive except through Catholicism.

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