

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. M. BOSSAERT

LOW SUNDAY

HOW PEACE, THAT HAS BEEN LOST, MAY BE REGAINED

Our Divine Saviour was announced by the prophet Isaiah as the Prince of Peace, and at His Birth the angels proclaimed peace to men. Now, when He has accomplished the great work of our redemption, our risen Lord greets His followers with the words: "Peace be with you."

In order to supply men with the means of regaining peace of heart, after losing it by sin, He breathed on His Apostles and addressed to them the memorable words: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

1. It was by no mere accident that our Lord instituted this Sacrament on the evening after His glorious Resurrection. By His Passion and death He had reconciled the whole human race with God, and obtained grace for all men. Now He wished to provide a means whereby the grace of forgiveness, that He had won for all, should be conferred upon each individual, a means whereby the full tide of God's grace might be conveyed by innumerable channels to every needy soul.

2. By instituting the Sacrament of Penance, that is so necessary and so beneficial to us all, our Divine Saviour gave us fresh proof of His infinite love and mercy, and we must always be grateful to Him for it. In this way He made the Apostles and their successors, and all priests possessing faculties from their bishop, the friends, confessors and counselors of His people. A Catholic readily confides in them and opens his heart to them, disclosing all his inclinations, his passions and the motives of his actions.

3. Many would have made shipwreck of their lives, had they not been warned in time by their confessor: many would have plunged deeper and deeper into sin, had not his voice induced them to return to the safe path; many would have rendered themselves miserable for time and for eternity, had the Holy Sacrament of Penance not existed, had they never confessed their sins, and had they not thus been extricated from the abyss into which they had fallen. How useful and beneficial is this Sacrament!

WHERE WOMEN COULD HELP

Under this title the Arkansas Gazette of March 5, ran the following editorial advice to our woman-kind. The editor surely had his eye out and on for some of the women presented daily and nightly by some of our Arkansas women, at home and abroad. He wrote: "Cardinal Mercier, the Belgian churchman, who won a high place in history by his conduct during the Great War, has issued his Lenten pastoral letter in which he puts upon the women responsibility for much of the extravagance of today and for the audacious dress or unbecoming luxury and the suggestive dance."

With no idea of shifting the blame or of minimizing the responsibility of men for many of the evils of today, we must say that in our opinion, Cardinal Mercier is right. The evils for which men are responsible are many, but there can be little doubt that women must accept the measure of responsibility that the Belgian churchman lays at their door. "If women should refuse to adopt the extreme styles in dress, there would soon be a change for the better. If women refused to read such books as 'Three Weeks' such books would not become best sellers."

If women refused to go to see sex plays or nasty plays of any kind, the failure of such plays to make money for their producers would take them off the stage."

THE NEW SPIRIT IN FRANCE

"Les Vous Romains—Away from Rome!" Many of us are familiar with that war-cry which for some considerable time roused up the German Protestants, and troubled certain Catholic consciences on the other side of the Rhine. Many of us know, too, that that same cry caused the most serious thought even in Austria itself. And here, today, France is pulsing with an aspiration that may be summed up in these two words: "Towards Rome!"

It is quite plain, from the testimony of the most prudent statesmen and the more clear-sighted interpreters of public opinion, that today France is marching towards the Vatican. There exists an abundance of reports and conjectures, which are more or less officially inspired, which foreshadow an approaching rapprochement between the Republic and the Holy See. These rumors are perhaps premature. But whether they originate with those journalists who hasten to anticipate the events of tomorrow; or whether they are spread abroad by political wire-pullers who wish to make abortive a reconciliation which is disturbing them, for all that they constitute an unmistakable sign of the direction of national thought.

Another indication of the same kind can be gleaned from the conversations among parliamentarians. For instance there is a story going the rounds these days of a conversation overheard in the lobbies of the Chamber between two ex-Ministers, both of whom are avowedly in favor of the resumption of relations with the Vatican.

"Are you still favorable," said the one ex-Minister to the other, "to the embassy to the Holy See?" "Oh," was the reply, "more than ever!" "Ah, it is evident that you aspire to become President of the Council!" That any prospective candidate for Cabinet office should have the interest to demand the re-opening of relations with the Pope is, in itself, a very remarkable sign of the new spirit.

It is true that this opinion is not shared by all the former political leaders of pre-war days. Many of them who forgot their animosities during the War, now that searching times have passed have returned to their former rancors and prejudices. Look at M. Combes, for instance. That former persecutor of the Church has fallen into merited oblivion but has tried to occupy again the public mind by calling for the resuscitation of the old blocs of political parties. But this ridiculous attempt has been followed by misadventure that is more than fortuitous; it is symbolic. Here is the incident: Some forty years ago M. Combes was elected mayor of the town of Pons in Charente-Inférieure, but at the recent elections the voters would not have him even for municipal councillor, for they cast their ballots against him. Again, he used to represent his canton in the Departmental Assembly as Councillor General, but he lost that seat last November and his old constituents elected a conservative. This is a mere detail, but it is not without its significance.

But to return to more important matters. Pending the re-opening of diplomatic relations with Rome, the Government has missed no opportunity of recognizing the prestige and authority of the Princes of the Church. The recent presence of two Cardinals in Paris has a significance that should not be overlooked.

The first of these, Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, came to attend the session of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences. This august assembly, which admits foreigners to corresponding membership only, did itself the honor during the War of receiving into its corporate body the Primate of Belgium, and it wished to make the reception of that illustrious prelate an occasion of unusual ceremony. But the importance of the affair was due not so much to the solemnity of the procedure, as to the character of the discourses. On the day following the reception a member of the Institute declared that he had never taken part under the dome of the Palais Mazarin, "at a session so remarkably Christian." Now it was not solely the address of Cardinal Mercier which inspired this appreciation, for one expects the language of the Gospel from the Archbishop of Malines. Nor was it the allusion to the presentation oration, which the Academy had entrusted to Père Sertillanges for its mouthpiece, the Institute knew that it would hear an apostolic voice. But the two Academicians who greeted and received the Prince of the Church recognized and proclaimed in him the representative of God. In the same moment when they affirmed their admiration for the great patriot they saluted also the great Bishop. They called to mind the courageous appeal to the judgments of God which Cardinal Mercier had made to ring in the ears of von Bissing. "You have been heard of God, Eminence," said the President of the Academy, "and He has answered." After him another Academician, M. Imbart de la Tour, alluded to the Divine action in human events. "You have participated," he declared

to the Cardinal, "in the designs of God on the earth."

If I add that the Primate of Belgium, after having been applauded in the Institute, was the object of the enthusiastic veneration of the population of Paris, and was received by the Head of the State with the most cordial and respectful courtesy I shall have indicated sufficiently, I believe, the importance and the character of his visit.

The other Cardinal, who was in Paris at the same time, is Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Rouen. He left very shortly after for Toulon, where he embarked for Palestine. He has gone to carry the greetings of the French Catholics to the numerous missionary enterprises which our Religious Congregations are conducting in Asia Minor, enterprises which have remarkably increased the prestige of France in the Near East.

I do not pretend to know the underlying motives of that journey; indeed, perhaps it has no underlying motives. I know nothing whatever about any part of the Government may have taken in Cardinal Dubois' determination, nor for that matter, whether it has taken any part at all. I limit myself to stating certain facts that are common knowledge. The Archbishop of Rouen has crossed the Mediterranean in a French battleship, placed at his disposal by the Minister of Marine. On landing in the East he will be attended by General Gouraud, Commandant of the French military forces in Syria, and will be received with all the honors that befit a great dignitary of the Church considered as a high personage of the State.

Now, will any one say that these tributes are rendered to Cardinal Dubois simply because he has gone on a long voyage? On the day that Cardinal Dubois embarked at Toulon the President of the Republic, at a solemn reunion at the Sorbonne, paid a tribute to the work of national relief in which he called to mind the devoted labors of Cardinal Ametis in the cause of the union sacrée. M. Poincaré said among other things that the reconciliation between the Prince of the Church and the representatives of the State, brought about by the War, was no less indispensable for the maintenance of peace than for the winning of victory.

On the following day, this patriotic speech was echoed at an important banquet, in a way that five years ago would have seemed wildly and fantastically impossible. The members of the national bloc in Paris, elected last November, met to celebrate their triumph. Seated on either side of M. Adolphe Carnot, President of the Democratic Alliance, were that notoriously extremist Radical, M. Bonnet, and M. Xavier de la Rochefoucauld, delegate of the Action Libérale Populaire. This latter association, which is uncompromisingly Catholic, was at one time the object of hostile and scornful derision, but it had the place of honor, and as one of the orators at the banquet said, the time has come when it must take its place with the majority.

Has that association, by any chance, bought its prominence at the price of compromise? There would be no need to ask that question if one could have heard the speech of M. de la Rochefoucauld, when he boldly and unequivocally ended his discourse with the invocation: "God protect France and the Republic!" The same words, five years ago, would have taken that invocation as a war-cry and a challenge. Now they greeted it with prolonged applause. And why?

To answer that we must turn to Colonel Fabry, a Republican of the Left, and one of those elected last November, who gave the explanation when he called to mind the fraternal spirit that pervaded the army. "Liberty of conscience," God Fabry said, "is something we learn to love better on the field of battle. We saw the strength it gave to men, strength that carried them to the consummation of the supreme sacrifice; strength that they were enabled to draw upon from the treasury of their unshaken faith!" Yes, indeed, there is a new spirit!—François Veuillot in America.

SIGNS OF SOCIAL DECAY

Modern life shows many signs of a reversion to barbarism. Much that today is the vogue among so-called cultured classes is but a renewal of pagan practices. For example Spiritism is ancient necromancy brought up to date. The superstitions which have been so falsely attributed to the "dark ages" and a ready acceptance among the so-called initiates of our day.

Co-incident with the revival of Spiritism has come the growth of clairvoyancy. It is perhaps safe to say that never has fortune telling had the vogue it has today. Cards, crystal gazing, sand reading and the various arts of witchcraft are called upon to satisfy the cravings of large numbers of men and women to learn the secrets of the past, present, and future. The increase in numbers and in prosperity of those who make a livelihood by fortune-telling has been one of the deplorable results of after-the-war hysteria. Such practices are expressly forbidden by the first commandment. No unbiased investigator can deny that some times extraordinary revelations are made about the past, prophecies are made that come true. These may be explained by natural and prateratural means. The resourcefulness of fortune-tellers is

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proverbial. It is unscientific to attribute all their messages to the instrumentality of the devil.

The complex activities of the subconscious mind can be drawn upon to provide information. Psychological conditions of the inquirer may reveal to the seer perception of the clairvoyant things hidden from the observer. Moreover it is not outside the range of credibility to believe that members of the trade have established an efficient system of espionage over prospective clients. It has happened in trans-Atlantic circles that fortune tellers have provided themselves with information gleaned by shrewd detective work.

As for future revelations that eventuate they may often be explained by coincidence. It may be that the suggestion of the future prophecy makes an unconscious impression upon the mind and shapes future events. No one will deny that weak minded people are affected by the predictions of the future. A strong mind may sneer at the probability of such folly, yet even the strongest minds in moments of quiet introspection may be profoundly affected by a fortune teller's word and unconsciously act so as to bring about the effect foretold. Again the devil by his power of suggestion may easily bring it about that the person may co-operate to produce the effect which has been told by the fortune-teller.

Dabbling in Spiritism and consulting fortune-tellers is against the express commands of God and the Church. Catholics who have any part in these deliberation sin against light. They are also guilty of encouraging the work of the devil and his agents by supporting agencies of superstition. When religion decays, superstition thrives. The present resurgence of paganism is a direct consequence of the banishment of religion from the hearts of a large portion of the human race. To keep the heritage of their faith unscathed Catholics should scrupulously avoid this Spiritistic contagion abroad in the world.—The Pilot.

DECOURUM

A little child's mind is as receptive as a thirsty blossom, with petals spread to receive heaven-sent dew. Children love the mysterious in any form, and are ready to be impressed by facts quite beyond their comprehension. The fault lies not with them therefore, when a shocking lack of reverence for the Real Presence is displayed by an increasing number of these little ones. Four children, none of whom could have reached ten years, came into a church not long since, with skipping steps and smiling faces. They slid into a pew convenient to a Confessional, and without even one moment upon bended knees, sat back and surveyed the few waiting penitents. In loud whispers, the two larger girls decided which of the patient fathers should bring peace to their not overburdened souls. Then the four went to confession. Ten minutes later the church door swung to upon their clanking heels and they were gone, gone back to the noisy street or their no less noisy homes. Now the point is this: if these little ones were taught the need and desirability of confession and there was no doubt about that, judging from the business-like manner in which they achieved absolution, why were they not at the same time given a loving realization of the Divine Presence of Him who said, "Forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven?"—New World.



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