

**FIVE MINUTE SERMON**

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**THE INSINCERITY OF THE WORLD**

"Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the will of My Father who is in Heaven, he shall enter in to the Kingdom of Heaven." — Matt. 7: 21.

In this world there are many deceivers. The honest man comes in contact with them almost every day that he spends among people. There are others around him of whom he does not know. If the deceiver were known to every one, his career would be but a short one. In fact, he can not be a deceiver as long as men know him as such. Hence, as we journey through life, we know not whether we are walking among just or unjust. Signs are not infallible, and in many instances time tells tales that surprise us beyond measure. Of course, the usual and recognized signs of sincerity in a person do not always fail us, but many times they do. We are often astounded at the insincerity which is gradually, or sometimes almost instantaneously, exhibited by some one in whom we have trusted and confided. Such revelations incline the just man to become very skeptical about the sincerity of the human race; and when honest people doubt the sincerity of their fellow-beings, many in the world—especially the innocent—suffer. Who will doubt that the charity in the world is done by the honest and just? Who will doubt that all the benefits of lasting and practical value are also conferred upon humanity by the honest and the just? It is certain, then, that where the greatest sincerity abides, the more will this just and honest part of humanity give of its abundance. Thus will the people, particularly the needy, be helped.

But alas! how much insincerity is witnessed in the world! How the inclinations of corrupt human nature are given free reign, and men allow themselves to be brought to the lowest depths of degradation! Few, indeed, conquer themselves as they should. God, no doubt, will take into consideration the weakness of poor human nature; but now He will punish the one who has not fought as he should against its unlawful dictates and strengthened his will against its weakness? Men may deceive one another, but to God's eyes each one will appear as he really is. It is no wonder that God has told us, for our satisfaction as well as for our knowledge, that not every one that saith to Him "Lord, Lord," will be saved.

It is a result of the justice dwelling in a man that he desires to see the deceiver punished. But in this world he realizes that but few will be punished as they deserve. God has given man an assurance that there will come a day when the deceiver will not only no longer be able to deceive, but also when he will be deprived of the sight of God—the greatest and only real, true, lasting blessing that could come to man. Hence—though we desire to see the world rid of such men, and though we know it can not be done—we must, nevertheless, in our charity, do what we can for humanity, waiting for the day when God chooses to reward the good and punish the wicked.

How wise was Our Lord to warn us of one class only, as it were, of those who go through life as hypocrites and deceivers—those, namely, who feign a devotion to Him and pronounce with polluted lips that sacred name, at the very mention of which every knee that is in heaven or on earth should bend. These are often the more difficult to discover. Under the veil of religion, they parade their hypocrisy. With their lips they say "Lord, Lord," but within their hearts lurks a demon most hideous. Since we can not read what is in men's hearts, we must form our opinion from what we see and hear. Our Lord tells us, however, that we will be forced to change our opinions of many on the last day, when the veil of hypocrisy will be lifted from their lives.

There are many also of the present day, pronouncing God's name in false religious sects, who will not enter the kingdom of heaven. This is not to be said of those who are in good faith, but of those who, with their lips, on Sunday cry out "Lord, Lord," and on every other day criticize and calumniate their neighbor. It is to be said of those, too, who loudly profess themselves ministers of God, but who wound the golden virtue of charity by condemning and falsely accusing the true followers of Christ.

**SOURCE OF DISTRACTIONS**

To quote from an authoritative writer on the interior life, here is what St. Teresa says of involuntary distractions at prayer: "There is another thing which greatly afflicts those who give themselves to prayer. It is the distractions which often come and carry their thoughts, and their hearts, too, hither, and thither. These come at times from the immortification of the senses; at times from the soul's being distracted in itself; and often because the Lord wills it, to try His serv-

ants. Now, in such cases, we must recall our thoughts from time to time, by reviving our faith in the presence of God, and by remaining before Him with reverence and respect. If we do not succeed in fixing them on the prescribed point, we must bear these annoyances and vexations with humility and patience. It will not be lost time, as at first sight may appear, but such a prayer may sometimes be more fruitful than many others made with recollection and pleasure. For all the actions performed to banish or to endure these distractions, as they are done in order not to displease God, and to become better qualified for His service, are so many acts of the love of God."

**THE MEANING OF OBERAMMERGAU**

John C. Reville, S. J., in America

In its comment on the refusal of Anton Lang, who plays the part of Christ in the Oberammergau Passion Play, to perform in the United States and thereby, no doubt, to reap a small fortune, the New York Herald correctly says that the dignified refusal of the Bavarian peasant binds a new chapter of laurel upon his brow. In declining the invitation, the peasant-actor is reported to have replied: "I am not a professional actor; I am in Oberammergau, and cannot give up the conditions and traditions of my village. The Passion Play for us is the fulfilment of a vow which our ancestors have made. We never shall forget this fact. . . . I should not be able again properly to personate the Saviour." This is an answer worthy of a genuine artist and a devout Catholic. We know that the sentiment which dictated it, animates both Lang himself and his fellow-performers, from Martha Veith, who plays the part of Our Lady, and Peter Rendl who plays Joseph of Arimathea, down to the humblest village lads and maidens who figure in the wonderful tableaux of the drama.

The answer given by Lang not only lets us understand the artistic sincerity of the villagers of Oberammergau, it recalls, what so many who see the Passion Play or read of it, so readily forget, that its performance every tenth year, is for the villagers something more than a display of dramatic talent, something better than a stirring and colorful spectacle. For the devout folk of this Bavarian countryside, it is a religious act. It has a quasi-sacramental character and is in their eyes invested with something of the solemnity with which they might share in a sacred function of the liturgy. It is the thank-offering which they present to God for a great deliverance. There is something Hebraic in its purpose, in its setting and in the motives which dictated it. Only among a people, semi-patriarchal in the simplicity of its government and traditions, as well as in the purity of its morals and faith, could such a manifestation be found.

The student of the Greek dramas, the "Atræmonion" of Aeschylus or the "Oedipus Rex" of Sophocles, in order to understand them fully, must know the history of the House of Pelops and Laius. To understand the Passion Play, something should be known of the history of Germany during the Thirty Years' War. Born of religious and national hatreds, the deadly fruit of the upas-tree planted in the Reformation, that calamity arrested the growth of Germany for years. It burst like a storm even over the peaceful homes of Oberammergau nesting under the protecting ramparts of the Bavarian Alps. For centuries that little village had acted an unpretentious Passion Play in the simple and artless fashion which had been a tradition among its people. But in 1633 war had overrun Bavaria. Its Arcadian valleys and minister-guarded hills, reached to the din of war as Swedish, French and German armies fought in a cruel and meaningless conflict. What part of the population the sword had spared, the subsequent plague threatened to carry away. For a long time, thanks to its vigilance and its rigidly enforced quarantine, Oberammergau protected by its girdle of hills, was untouched by the disease.

In his German-English edition of the Bavarian drama, W. T. Stead, who did much to bring the Passion Play to the attention of the outside world, graphically tells us how at last the plague found its way into the secluded fastnesses of Oberammergau. When it broke out, Carl Schuchler, a good burgher of Oberammergau, was at work in the neighboring village of Eschenlohe, one of the first localities to be attacked. For a while he bore with patience his enforced exile. But health and home, the hill-creeks, fields and valleys of Oberammergau, the voices of wife and child, were calling. They could not be resisted. Reckless of consequences, and burning with love for his native village, the Eschenlohe prisoner eluded the guards, that sentinelled every mountain path, and once more clasped wife and child in his arms. But swift was the retribution. Two days after his return, the disease whose deadly germs he had brought with him from Eschenlohe, had carried him away. It spread rapidly. In little more than a month, eighty-four villagers of Oberammergau, smitten with the plague, were laid to rest in the little cemetery by Schuchler's side.

And gloom, deeper than the shadows that fell from the Kofel crag that guarded the entrance to their valley, hung like a pall over every home. Helpless before the storm, the good burghers were not hopeless. With the virile faith of their race and an unbroken trust in Providence they turned to God and vowed that in gratitude for the deliverance which they knew would come, they would revive, and every ten years enact, their old Passion Play. From that moment the plague ceased.

Ever since, with the rarest exceptions, Oberammergau has been faithful to its vow. The play is therefore an essentially religious act, a fixed religious institution. The villagers feel that it must forever be kept on this high plane. Both from religious and artistic point of view, they are correct in their resolution. Into their acting they put two of the mightiest forces which sway the heart, the love of home, and the love of God. The love of home prompts them to celebrate the goodness and the mercy of a merciful Father towards their own Oberammergau, from which He turned aside the sword of war's dread brother, pestilence. With their simple, yet sublime faith, how, though they could they sing that loving-kindness better, than by bringing before the eyes of their people, the goodness and mercy of the Man-God Himself, when He deigned to suffer and to die in order to redeem His sinful children.

This is the genesis of the Passion Play. It is a sublime conception. It has an appeal wider than ever came from the story of the Pelopidae or the tale of Troy. It came to a people admirably situated to give it an almost perfect scenic, dramatic and histrionic setting. Deep-set in the hollow of the mountains that keep guard around Oberammergau offers an amphitheatre superior in some ways to that wherein of old, on the great Dionysiac festivals, assembled Greece listened to Electra's wail as she held in her hand the ashes of Orestes and stirred thousands to tears in immortal verse, or saw Oedipus pluck out his eyes in very shame when the horrid secret, he had so impudently sought, was revealed at last. Like Athens of old, the little Bavarian village is the home of art. The village fold are potters, wood-carvers, weavers, toy-makers. They have an instinct for the beautiful, are deft, earnest and sincere craftsmen. In mature round about them, on the hills, in field and forest, over the wayside memorials to Our Lady, before which they kneel to pray, broods that peace, that atmosphere of prayer and unworldliness, so absolutely necessary for the creation of genuine art. Locked in among the mountains, Oberammergau has so far been untainted by the commercialism and the materialism of our age. The Bavarian hillside still knows the beauty of simplicity and work.

We must be grateful, says W. T. Stead, to Carl Schuchler, the exile from home, whose death from the plague occasioned the vow whose fulfilment we now witness every ten years. After him, adds the Englishman, we must be grateful to Father Daisenberg, the good parish priest of Oberammergau in those war and pestilence-ridden days of the seventeenth century. Daisenberg is the genius, for nothing short of that name befits him, who dramatized the Passion Play and gave it permanent form. This village pastor, who for thirty years, lived and toiled among the folk of Oberammergau, is one of the world's great dramatists. He is Bavaria's Calderon and its Lope de Vega. In their autosacramentales the two Spaniards have little that is superior to Daisenberg's magnificent conception. Like all popular dramatists, like Shakespeare and the Greeks, who worked on pre-existing material, Daisenberg worked on old materials, those drawn from the New and Old Testaments. With the insight given him by his deep faith, and with a dramatic power that swept all history into his ken, Daisenberg saw in the Passion of Our Lord the culmination and the crown of the world's past history. He does not merely tell the story of the Passion as it stands in the Gospels. He connects it with the Old Testament story and the history of the human race in a daring conception. Nowhere perhaps does his purpose appear more clearly and dramatically than in the tableaux of his masterpiece.

The stage has scarcely anything more beautiful or dramatic. These tableaux form a *Biblia Pauperum*, a course in Bible history for the toiler and the uneducated, and often for the learned scholar, which startle at times by their magic interpretation of the Scriptures. Under Daisenberg's creative touch, the Old Testament is so finely dramatized that we at once see the links that bind it to the New. In the first tableau, we see the tree of life in the garden of Paradise; the following shows us the adoration of the Cross, that sweetest tree on which hung the Author of Life Himself. In another tableau we behold the sons of Jacob, leaning against the well of Dothan conspiring against innocent Joseph who is the Sanhedrin conspiring against that second Joseph, who is the Saviour of the world. The agony in the Garden and the bloody sweat from which Our Lord suffered in Gethsemane, are preceded by the pictures of Adam and Eve tilling the hard

ground, and Job treacherously murdering Amasa, prophetic image of the cruel betrayal of Our Lord by Judas. All these are built on Scriptural and dramatic lines seldom surpassed. The whole of the Old Testament, W. T. Stead, admirably says, is thus made as it were, "the massive pedestal of the Cross." And Father Daisenberg tells us that he "undertook the production of the play for the love of my Divine Saviour and with only one object in view, the edification of the Christian world." The spirit of Daisenberg still guides the peasant artists of Oberammergau.

**THE GARDEN OF ALLAH**

The Johannesburg Sunday Times, of April 10th, contains a criticism of the play "The Garden of Allah," which has been going the rounds of the theatres of South Africa. The writer is not satisfied with stating his opinion of the play as a play; he allows himself a few digressions on the subject of the monastic life. The philosophy of life which inspires that denial of self which finds expression in the seclusion of the cloister is as difficult to comprehend to worldlings today as was the Gospel of crucified God to the proud Roman and cultured Greek of old. It is, of course, in direct conflict with the philosophy which guides the lives of those to whom Christianity, and especially Catholicism, is a soul-numbing and joy-killing system stifling all the best emotions of the human heart. It is not necessary to tell the Catholic that there is incomparably more peace and happiness in the hearts of those who have left all that the world cherishes, in order that they may follow more closely on the footsteps of the lowly and lonely Jesus of Nazareth. If there is any truth in the dictum of St. Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are not at peace until they rest in Thee," that life of renunciation which brings us nearer to Him is the normal life for those who appreciate the counsels of the Gospel. The child who has learnt his catechism knows that man has been made for God, and that only in the contemplation of Him can man find the fulfilment of the noblest yearnings of his heart.

**"WASTE OF GOD'S LIFE"**

If our Johannesburg critic cannot understand all this, and can find no other terms in which to describe the monastic life except "a waste of God's good life" in a "barren hideous cell," he is but displaying his ignorance of the ideals of that life which has brought happiness to millions of souls. Catholicism is referred to in his article as the "Papacy," quite a common mistake with those whose readiness to write on things Catholic is equalled only by their ignorance. We are treated to a very subtle distinction between "religiosity" and "religiosity," the possessor of which deludes "himself into the belief that his tenets are holy and righteous instead of abominable malpractices." A more stupid dissertation on the monastic life of the Church is difficult to imagine. He shows himself devoid of even the smallest rudimentary knowledge of the life or ideals on which he so flippantly writes.—Southern Cross.



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