

FIVE-MINUTE SERMON

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE MOST HOLY ROSARY

Sunday last, my dear brethren was Rosary Sunday, and we cannot do better than to consider the excellent and this popular devotion and the spiritual advantages that grow from its cultivation. The Rosary is one of the oldest special devotions in the Catholic Church, and it is the most universal because of its appeal to the faith and fervor and intelligence of all classes. It combines the highest forms of vocal and mental prayer—the prayers taught us by our Blessed Redeemer Himself, by the Angel Gabriel, by St. Elizabeth, and by the Holy Church, and its meditations embrace the chief events in the divine life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is, in fact, a sort of summary of the Gospels, and supplies in a simple way the very best spiritual nutriment to the Christian soul.

The prayer of the Rosary is offered up to almighty God through the invocation of the Blessed Virgin, and six long centuries bear witness to its efficacy. The devotion of the beads was, as you know, introduced by the great St. Dominic in the thirteenth century, and ever since his time it has been a favorite form of prayer with the Saints of God. It has been approved again and again by the Supreme Authority in the Church and several of the Popes have enriched it with indulgences, and the practice of it has come to be regarded as a mark of the true spirit of Catholic faith and loyalty, and even as an earnest of perseverance and salvation. Our present great Pontiff, Leo XIII., has the greatest devotion to it, and recommends its recital as a most certain means of obtaining the divine assistance for the needs of the Church in our day.

With this end in view he has established the October devotion, and he employs the faithful throughout the world to say the Rosary every day during this month for the general good of religion. And surely every Catholic in whose heart there is any real love of God and His Holy Church will gladly unite with the Virgin of Christ in telling his beads for the religious welfare of mankind. But our devotion to the Rosary should be confined to one month in the year; it should be as constant as the rising and setting of the sun itself. It should be a daily form of prayer with each and every one of us.

There is no household worthy of the name of a Christian home in which the Rosary should not be recited every evening as a family prayer, and there is no individual Catholic man or woman, no matter what their station or condition may be, who should not carry their beads and say them regularly; nay more, all good Catholics ought to have their names enrolled in the Confraternity of the living Rosary, and take part in their world-wide communion of prayer and propitiation. For, blessed as we are by spiritual dangers and temptations, we need a special bond of union and strength, and where can we find one more simple and efficacious than this?

Have you troubles in your family? Say the beads every day, and say them with a pure heart. Have you passions to overcome? Recite the Rosary faithfully, and see if you will not gain the mastery over them? Some time ago a poor slave of intemperance came to the pledge, he acknowledged that he had broken through the pledge several times already. "Are you really in earnest, do you want to get rid of the cursed passion for drink?" the priest asked him. "Yes, I am," he replied. "Then, go to work and say the Rosary every day, that you may have grace to persevere in keeping your pledge." "Father," said he, "I'll do it. I'll go and get beads and say them every day." And the poor fellow has said the Rosary every day since, and he has kept his pledge. How many homes in our midst would be made happy if the victims of this horrible passion would follow this example and apply this simple remedy! For there is no vice that may not be overcome by persevering in prayers, and there is no prayer more powerful than the prayer of the Rosary.

OUR UNSEEN GUIDES

A MEDITATION ON OCTOBER AND THE ANGELS BY FATHER DALY, S. J.

Writing of "October and the Angels" in America, Rev. James J. Daly, S. J., says:

"Almost every aspect of October, dedicated by the Church to angelic devotion, seems to be an external grace working in harmony with the spirit of the Church and with the supernatural voices of the soul reminding us of the invisible beings forever active among us in the service of their Master and ours. Nature has been busy about many things during the spring and summer—the grain, the grasses, the flowers, the leaves, the insects and the birds, and countless other things besides; but now, as our poets have often pointed out, she assumes in profound peace and inward ecstasy the prayerful part of Mary. Her work is done and with folded hands she nestles close to the Master and gazes into His eyes. Her mood of serene aloofness, of arrested turmoil and agitation, lies upon the hills and sinks into the valleys; and even into the turbulent cities comes faint news of the sabbath hush that has fallen upon the world as if some great miracle were happening."

When the earth swings into the autumnal segment of its orbit it seems to be nearest to heaven; and the hearts of men, like nature, feel the awe of it and are stirred with new thoughts. The past and the future seem to coalesce and the present to drop away utterly from us except as a point from which to look backward and forward. A distant sound or an evanescent gleam of dying sunlight on a cornice or a tree across a field, or the scent of the woods, the landscape seen through the misty air, or perhaps something too subtle for detection, will unexpectedly unlock the

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memory and flood the soul with messages from long ago.

And it is sad to gaze back over where our past lies prone; and it is sad to gaze on the lawns where the shriveled leaves huddle before the wind. But lo! the wind, that seems to lose about our dead hopes and dreams and friendships in its rough play with the withered leaves, mocks at our sadness, stirs our blood as with wine, and swings us about face towards the future, with our shoulders squared and our most certain means of obtaining the divine assistance for the needs of the Church in our day.

The office of the Church is full of allusions and petitions to the angels. Almost every day of the year the priest in reciting his breviary makes the prayer: "May the King of Angels bring us into the company of that heavenly citizenry." The closing prayer of Communion with which every priest daily ends his office is a supplication for their aid: "Visit, we beseech Thee, O Lord, this habitation, and drive from it all snares of the enemy: let Thine holy angels dwell therein, to keep us in peace and may Thy blessing be always upon us." Their office which is said on the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, October 2, is full of interest and strange beauty, it is so full of the Church's close and loving intimacy with those mighty and splendid beings that stand by the most personal relations to us and whom we can know so imperfectly because our comprehension, still comes along the avenues of sense. But the Lord of the worlds of spirit and of matter has told us: "and His Church tells us that His angels have charge over us, and so we listen very reverently to the words of St. Bernard which the Church repeats on the Angels' feast: 'What respect, what thankfulness, what trust, ought this word to work in thee! Respect for their presence, thankfulness for their kindness, trust in their safekeeping. Walk carefully, as one with whom angels, as hath been laid in charge upon them, in all thy ways. In every lodging, in every nook, have reverence for thine angel. Dare not to do in his presence what thou wouldst not dare to do in mine.'"

The official and public homage paid by the Church to the Angels is reflected with beautiful variety in the private devotion of her children. We do not refer so much to the saluts of past time, so many of whom were noted for their constant regard of the angelic comrade at their side; the faithful world over, all partake in a lesser or greater degree of this consciousness of a guardian spirit who is their invisible comrade now, hereafter to be visible when he shall have led them to his home.

It is to be regretted that there has almost come to be an inherent vulgarity in the confession of angelic experiences. Protestantism with its gross exaggerations of spiritual exaltations on the one hand and, on the other, its incredulous humors, has destroyed that delicate atmosphere of simplicity in which the spirit grows without self-consciousness. Child-like frankness concerning heavenly blessings would too often now invite mockery and derision. And so the Catholic, alas! locks away his sacred possessions to save them from the insults of the ignorant. Else we should know more about tender intimacies and gentle converse with angelic presences going on forever in the silent places of the Church.

Now and then we catch rumors of it in which the spirit grows without self-consciousness. We wonder how many persons know of the English translation of a French book entitled, "Theodore Wibaux, Pontifical Zouave and Jesuit." It is the story of a lad, who, hardly more than a

child, with a fine fervor shouldered a musket and prepared to lay down his life in defense of a holy cause. The book is mainly taken up with the boy's letters, revelations of a noble hearted nature and a high string spirit. They are characteristically French; but although that quality has spoiled some books for us, it is here a source of genuine charm. Here is an extract from one of his letters to his mother: "From time to time I send my good angel to you, to remind you to pray for me, and I often have a visit from yours, especially of a morning, just about the time when you go to Communion. What a beautiful devotion this is to one's guardian angel! How it helps to smooth one's pathway through life! Everything that contributes to our spiritual joy comes from our good angel; how sweet to think of this kind friend and brother whom God has placed at our side to protect us! I love to invite him to be present whenever I go to Communion, and then I pray to Jesus and Mary to rejoice him with their loving notice; I think how happy they must make him, and I fancy I hear the gentle flutter of his wings. Then in return he suggests all manner of good thoughts to my mind. . . . Now the month of October has begun, let us make good use of the angels as messengers."

The writer of this letter went through the hardships and dangers of a campaign in a losing cause at a time when most boys are at school or college. His angel surely was blessed in having such a charge.

"Safely across the ocean track, O Angel! of my friend! Dear wife, and sweetly near him back: My loss, his exile, end, With white wings, mighty and unseen, Be guardian of him still, as thou hast been."

"Make kind to him the Afric sun, The Afric star, and moon; Then, when our Mayflower has begun To prophecy of June, Give us himself, lest summer be sorrow for lack of him: ah, promise me! 'Thee, O his angel! mine implores in tenderness to me: Far flashing toward those southern shores."

Mr. Sheldon pleads with thee, Saying: My charge is friend to thine: Guard thou him well, or I have fears for mine."

MR. SHELDON'S CONFESSIOAL

Is it possible that, at some future day, a throng of earnest Protestants will be besieging the confessional of their minister on Saturday nights? This is not intended as a pleasantry. Confessionals in Protestant churches have been vigorously advocated in several recent publications. The "Roman" practice of confessing sins, for centuries the bugbear of "our separated brethren" and the stock-in-trade of the anti-Catholic preacher, is becoming decidedly popular, at least in theory among some of the sects. Many clergymen are urging the institution of a "confessional" in each church, where those who are in mental distress or "soul sinfulness" may lay before their pastor their troubles and sorrows, and obtain from him light, sympathy and guidance. Not forgiveness; that would be a papistical superstition, one of the errors of the benighted Church of Rome.

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In other words, these clergymen have found that their Sunday discourses and their mothers' clubs and their Christian Endeavor meetings have given them very little real influence on the souls of their people. Naturally, they are trying to obtain more—and hence the "confessional."

One of its most recent advocates is Rev. Charles P. Sheldon. Some of our readers may remember that, some years ago, Mr. Sheldon was prominent, not to say notorious. He managed to get himself conspicuously in the limelight by writing a widely-advertised book entitled "In His Steps," and added to his ephemeral fame by acting for a week as editor of a "yellow journal," with the avowed (and almost blasphemous) intention of showing "how Christ would run a newspaper." Whether the said newspaper was improved even temporarily, or whether its readers were Christianized thereby, history saith not.

Well, Mr. Sheldon, though a self-avowed "yellow" man, he recognizes as well as his limitations will allow, that the Catholic confessional is "a commendable institution," and he probably means well in urging a somewhat similar feature in Protestant churches. But he is sublimely ignorant of the real purpose of the confessional.

Are we Catholics looking for comfort and guidance when we go to confession? Only incidentally. We wish to get forgiveness, to be cleansed from sin, to recover or increase God's grace in our souls. Comfort and advice, while secondary given in the confessional, are secondary to the real purpose of the sacred tribunal: counsel and sympathy may be found there—but if we get nothing else in confession we wouldn't go very often. The patriarch Job, received much of both in his afflictions, but he did not seem to do him much good. We would not thank a dentist for advice when we had an aching tooth. We would not seek sympathy from a physician if we had appendicitis.

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