

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

SEXAGESIMA

THE WORD OF GOD

"The seed is the word of God." (Luke viii. 11.) On other Sundays, my dear brethren, you may sit in judgment on the preacher, object to his arguments, doubt his correctness, or grudgingly own that he is right; but to-day our Blessed Lord not only speaks the parable, but actually explains it. So we are all taught the lesson to-day, and no one can escape knowing what God means and what we are bound to accept.

Our Lord was sitting in the boat, and a very great multitude crowded the banks. (Mark iv. 1.) Behind them, on the gentle slope of the hillside, there was doubtless taking place that to which our Lord called their attention. "Behold, the sower went out to sow." And it was all just as our Blessed Lord said. The sower, passing along, would skirt the pathway; and on the undulating ground boulders of rock would jut out here and there, hollows full of thorns and nettles would be found, and these got their share of the seed, as well as the good and fertile soil.

And afterwards, when He was alone, the twelve that were with Him asked Him what the parable might mean. And the Lord of truth and wisdom explained it. The parable is this: The seed is the word of God. My dear brethren, we know without being told that the sower was none other than Christ our Lord Himself. And from His own lips we learn that, out of four classes of men who listened to Him, in one only did His preaching bear fruit.

And our Blessed Lord explained the divisions separately. "They by the wayside are they that hear; then the devil cometh and taketh the word out of their heart, lest believing they should be saved." In St. Matthew it says: "And whilst he soweth some fall by the wayside, and the birds of the air come and eat them up." Where there is no caring, watching over, safeguarding the word of God is lost, as this seed by the wayside. The devil comes from him, lest a good beginning should be made. He does not want it to be remembered, practised, put into execution, lest believing they should be saved.

Now they upon the rock are they who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no roots. There was not much earth, and they sprang up immediately; and they were scorched by the heat of the sun, and because they had no roots they withered away. They believe for awhile, and in time of temptation they fall away. In these there was feeling, sentiment, but no depth of character. They fall away, deceived by their carnal desires, the vanities of the world, or the suggestions of the devil. They give up what they had begun so well. They abandon God, they consent to temptation. Were not many of the Jews themselves like this? They received our Lord with joy in their various cities, they crowded after Him; but at the time of His Passion, how they all fell away! When tribulation and persecution arose they were presently scandalized.

And that which fell among thorns! My dear brethren, remember it is our Blessed Lord who explains this. If it were anyone else, what an outcry there would be! How can pleasures and riches and cares of this life be likened to thorns? Choose either St. Mark's or St. Luke's words. The one says: "These are they who hear the word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things entering in choke the word, and it is made fruitless." (Mark iv. 18, 19.) And St. Luke puts it: "And that which fell among thorns are they who have heard, and going their way are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit." (Lk. vi. 7.) "Alas! the word of God in our hearts is smothered by superfluous cares, and the immoderate love of riches, and the pleasures of this life." "For they that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition." (1. Tim. vi. 9.) "Go not after thy lusts, but turn away from thy own will. If thou give to thy soul a joy to thy enemies." (Eccles. xviii. 30, 31.) Whether we look back to history, or look around us in our own days, countless are the examples we see of the truth of all this—religion, God's service, the Holy Faith, all choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life.

"But that on the good ground are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience." Let us resolve to belong to this one class. The rest all wasted and lost the word of God. Our duty is first to hear it. The more we hear it the more our hearts will be drawn towards it and improved by it. A good heart by natural disposition, the very good heart by the grace of God. Hear the word and keep it. Keep it—yes, in memory, and keep it by obedience. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (Jas. i. 22.) "They words have I hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee." (Ps. cxviii. 11.) Keep the word of God, and it is a safeguard to us; keep the word of God, and it directs us on our way; keep the word of God, and the strength of obedience is imparted to us that we may go on day by day

and keep the sacred word more and more. But fervour and alacrity merely will not suffice, for we bring forth fruit in patience. How many have lost heart in that work of patience! We cannot see the corn growing; God can. We grow weary of our own selves; we seem no better, no nearer heaven than we were years ago. Has the devil plucked the word from our hearts? Have there been no roots, and is our religion withered away? Have worldly cares and pleasures choked it? Praise God, no. But all our lives we must humbly hear the word, steadfastly keep it, and patiently—yes, so patiently—wait for the hundredfold.

AFTER THE WAR

The announcement that the Protestant bodies are to ask ten million dollars for postbellum reconstruction work has an interest for the Catholics of the country. It is proposed, as we take it, that a drive, after the manner of those to which we have become so accustomed, will invite those in sympathy with their cause to place at the disposal of the churches this vast sum for constructive plans to meet the needs of the coming years. That those needs have been somewhat multiplied and variously changed is not sufficient to contend with the world conflict, hence the absolute necessity of preparing for the future by finding the ammunition before time.

Whatever one may think about some of the changes which the war has brought to the religious world, as explained by these outsiders, it is confronted, or soon shall be, with the problems she has never before faced in this country. In the first place the boys who went across are returning with an entirely different view of the faith we profess. Our own faithful lads have had their visions broadened, let us hope, and the word, Catholicity, will mean something more comprehensive hereafter than it ever did in the past. From the letters which we have all had the good fortune to read the faith of the Catholic soldier has been made doubly strong even by the disaffection he witnessed on the other side. Because the defenders of other nations were remiss in their duty the Catholic warrior from the United States seems to have taken added glory from his staunch fidelity. The dangers that were encountered drove into his soul a sense of deeper dependence upon God and those who might have been very recent are coming back reconverted to the faith. If the new spirit is to endure it must not be permitted to lack cultivation.

Not only our own boys but those who were not adherents of the faith have undergone a marvelous transformation in their attitude towards the Catholic Church. We are not speaking here of the effect that must have been produced when those young men witnessed the ceremonies in the great cathedrals and had their spirits thrilled by the sight of the glorious monuments reared to the faith of which so many of them previously entertained nothing but despotic thought. The heroism of the chaplains must have impressed the boys in a way that will never fade. God shining their souls, risking their dangers, and often meeting the fate of the common soldier. Then the atmosphere of piety created by the good example of their partners who prayed in the trenches and grasped their crucifixes as they held their guns for action could not have been without some salutary influence on the minds of those who had no symbols of salvation, possibly, knew not how to pray. So these lads come back with new conceptions of Catholicity and with the souls half-plastic to receive the impression of the faith. If their good-will can be made a means of grace, there will be a terrible reckoning if the opportunity be lost.

When we say that the Church has new problems we are not confining the activities of the clergy. From the very nature of the situation there are avenues which the priests cannot enter and to which only laymen gain admittance. The duty of the coming hour, therefore, is not an exclusively clerical burden. The laity have the chief contact with these returning boys and through the laity must the opportunity brought by this war be embraced. We to us if the harvest which has been ripened under the planet Mars is not garnered for the true God of heaven.—The Guardian.

SPIRITUAL LONELINESS

A PROTESTANT TRIBUTE
"Sometimes amid the struggling forces of the twentieth century there comes over the soul of the bravest Christian a sense of spiritual loneliness. The forces that are opposed to righteousness seem so strong and so united. The forces of goodness are so separated and divided. Then there comes something of relief in standing under the mighty dome of St. Peter's and looking about on those twenty-seven confessionals where the children of men of every tongue come and forsake their sins. Then there comes a feeling of strength and unity and one looks up and reads the motto which runs in gigantic letters around the fane of that dome: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church,' and one adds in silence the rest of the sentence: 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"

"Then there is a wistfulness to creep under the shelter of one who

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is a true holy father, in the fulfillment of the Master's prophecy that there shall be one fold as there is one Shepherd. And the man of faith hesitates not to say that, in some way, a fast uniting Protestantism may some day come face to face with a fast spiritualizing Catholicism, in one Holy Church under one Lord, and united for the one purpose of making the kingdom of this world the kingdom of our Lord. For such a consummation may every Christian work, and pray.—Rev. Dr. Forbush.

FOREIGN MISSION NOTES

Bishop McNicholas of Duluth had hardly entered upon his new work when he sent to the American Foreign Mission Seminary at Maryknoll a generous gift to start a Diocese of Duluth Bure. We quote from The Field Star these apostolic words:

"We are short of funds to prepare young men for the priesthood but, I am entirely convinced that when there is a shortage we must not hoard the seed but plant it. It is simply Catholic to have an interest in the great foreign pagan mission field, where opportunities for the Kingdom of Christ are to-day perhaps the greatest in the history of the Church. By giving to a cause more in need than our own, we will win from the Lord, in His own good time, the material means and the vocations necessary for the diocese. It may take ten years to complete the bureau, but even if it should, with God's help I shall keep up my interest until the work is completed. Count on me to help you in any way that I can. I shall be very happy when the diocese of Duluth has its first priest ordained for your great mission field of China."

JOHN T. MCNICHOLES, O. P., Bishop of Duluth.

What follows is taken from a letter recently received by the light of Patrick J. Hayes, Chaplain-bishop, from Rev. George Caruana, Chaplain at the Canal Zone:

"I am just going to give you a small incident which happened at the Midnight Mass on Xmas Day. The altar was erected on the parade ground against the Post school building, which is surrounded by palm trees. A line of electrical lights was stretched around these trees and they illuminated the open space to a good distance. The regimental band took its position on the Gospel side and the choir on the other. The soldiers formed a semi-circle from one extremity to the other, and we had the altar and the men. There is a little hill on one side of the ground and this was occupied by the Catholic colored population of the neighborhood, and they turned out strong. The Chinese Catholic family got in between the lines of soldiers and a look of surprise came over every face as the whole Chinese family advanced towards the altar leading the other devout look on their faces that one could not help feeling warmed up to the treasures of our Faith. I was so glad that there were many American soldiers present for it taught them that the Chinese made as good Catholics as anyone in the world. It was a lesson in the Propagation of the Faith, and maybe it will produce results in the near future which will rejoice the hearts of Mgr. Dunn and Father Walsh. Their piety and devotion formed quite a contrast to the blank and formal one of the poor Porto Ricans, most of whom had not been to Mass since last Xmas. The old and new Catholics are very different from each other when exemplified by these two races. So I say again that there is a great hope for the triumph of our Faith in China!"

The thousands of Catholics in this country and abroad who have read in The Field Star during the past year the travels of the Maryknoll Superior, will welcome the promised appearance of these letters in book form. They will be entitled "Observations in the Orient," and are expected from the press about Easter.

Fr. Spencer, S. M., of Yokohama is deeply interested in the story of early Christianity in Japan. He is accumulating notes that will prove most valuable and deserves more of a backing than he can possibly get

in Japan itself. Lately while in Sendai for a short rest, Fr. Spencer was conducted by Bishop Berling to the tomb of a distinguished Japanese named Hasekura Rokuemon, who served as ambassador to the Pope in 1613. As they were looking at the inscription the keeper of the place, a house (a pagan priest), said to the bishop: "This man died a Catholic, his sons also, and his grandsons, who were martyred. A cross should be set on his tomb." Fr. Spencer has relatives at Dayton, Ohio.

WHY HE LOVES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

"I want to tell you in a very simple way why I love the Roman Catholic Church, and why I believe it is the duty of every Christian to love that Church sincerely:

"First I love the Roman Catholic Church because of what she has been. It is the mother church. Let me emphasize that. Our churches are all the offspring of the church. A few ultra Protestants will try to claim that they trace their genealogy through some stray erratic movements back to the Apostles, without touching the Church of Rome, but this is largely imaginary.

"For more than a thousand years Rome preserved the integrity and transmitted the vitality of the Christian gospel before ever anything like Protestant secession was dreamed of; and when the Protestant movement came it was made possible as a branch is made possible on the vine; it grew out of the strong vitality of the mother church.

"Now I hold that it is a matter of simple decency to be loyal to one's mother. I could not respect myself if I could forget that as a Christian, I owe my very being as a Christian, I owe all the light and joy and liberty in Christ I enjoy, to the mother church. To her I owe the very existence of that Bible which I love; to her I owe the sacraments which are the symbols of our faith; to her I owe the lives of saints whose footsteps have pressed the earth, making it a holier and happier place because they have lived and died to love a church that has done all that and much more for me as a Christian. For fifteen hundred years the preaching and pastors, the hymn writers and the church builders, the social reformers and the mystics, the theologians and the poets of all Europe west of Russia were Roman Catholics. All our spiritual wealth as Protestants is an inherited wealth: inherited through the Roman Catholic Church.

"Secondly, I love the Roman Catholic Church for what she is. We do not know what beautiful Christians there are among the Catholics, because we do not know them, and they do not know how sincerely Protestants are trying to be followers of the same Christ whom they serve.

"But it is not true that the Roman Catholic Church is an un-American and is seeking to overthrow our government, and all that? I hesitate not to say that I believe it is a foul and hateful calumny. The people who say these things have not one solid fact upon which to base their monstrous indictment. It is an utterly unworthy frame of mind for brethren of Christ to have towards each other. We must get this miserable slander out of our heads. By every test which can be fairly applied, the Catholic citizen stands on a par with his Protestant brother."—Rev. E. E. Snell (Congregationalist.)

LINCOLN WAS BORN IN CATHOLIC FAITH

GREAT PRESIDENT FELL AWAY DUE TO JOINING SECRET SOCIETY

(By a Pioneer Priest)

At every anniversary of President Lincoln's birth, we hear much of his life. His boyish pranks are yearly repeated, but his religion in his youth is seldom mentioned. This can be accounted for by the fact that, in his youth, Lincoln was a Catholic, a member of a Church that takes not into consideration earthly honor, power, or glory, extolls only for virtues that lead to Heaven. While it is true she has on her list of saints, thousands of kings, queens and others in high station, they are not there because of their accidental positions of power in this world but for the way they served God.

Lincoln's father and his step mother were Catholics. Some dissent the religion of his father, but Father J. M. J. St. Cyr, in whose parish the Lincolns lived, says Thomas Lincoln was a Catholic, and he adds, "I often said Mass in his house and heard the confessions of his children."

Father Lefever, who, when stationed at Indian Creek Monroe County, Mo., had for his parish four counties in Missouri and five in Illinois, always said Mass in the Lincoln home when visiting Clarys Grove, Ill. The Lincolns came to Clarys Grove from Rolling Fork, Ky., where young Abe was born.

Father Lefever, afterwards Bishop Lefever of Detroit, was in Paris, France, at the time of Lincoln's assassination. To a reporter for the "Mode," published there, he said, "I am pained to hear of poor Lincoln's death." He declared the affair might not have happened,

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had he but taken the advice I gave him when he was a boy living in New Salem, to avoid all places of public amusements during the Holy season of Lent. 'Say your beads, Abe,' I told him. Here now he has been killed in a theatre on Good Friday. Poor Abe was a good, kind boy. He used to help me fix a place to say Mass. He once made six chairs and gave them to me. After I left there, I lost track of him. I was told he married a Presbyterian and fell away from the religion of his young days, otherwise he would not have been where he was when assassinated. I hope they will get the murderer."

Archbishop Ireland of St. Paul, who was chaplain in the army, said in the New York Tablet in 1899 that "Lincoln never denied his religion but having joined some society condemned by the Church, he naturally fell away."

The late Bishop Hogan of Kansas City wrote exhaustively on the subject many years ago and his writings are still preserved in a scrapbook in the Cathedral residence.—Kansas City Catholic Review.

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