

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. P. HICKES, O. S. B.
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST

CHOSEN, BUT NOT WORTHY
"His own city." (Matt. ix. 1)

What a privilege to be styled "His own city"! The favoured, the chosen city of Christ. And what place is referred to? Is it Bethlehem, for sweet memory's sake of that first Christmas night? Or Nazareth, blessed as the home of the Holy Family so long? No, Jerusalem, where He taught, kept the festivals, and wrought so many wonders among the people? None of these. That favoured spot, "His own city," stood by the Sea of Galilee, for the Gospel says: "And entering into a boat, He passed over the water, and came into His own city." (Matt. ix. 1.) This was the first place He came to after His baptism; here He dwelt for awhile with His first disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John. It was outside this town, on the rising hillside, to accommodate the multitude, that Christ preached His first sermon, taught the eight Beatitudes and the "Our Father." From Simon's boat, in front of this town, He taught the people, and its inhabitants saw the miraculous draught of fishes. Here dwelt the nobleman whose son He cured; here He healed the demoniac in the synagogue. Here He spoke the word that made whole the centurion's servant, and raised the daughter of Jarius to life. It was to this city He came after feeding the five thousand people, and in its synagogue He told them that He was the Bread of Life. "He that eateth this Bread shall live forever." "These things He said, teaching in the synagogue in Capharnaum." (John vi. 60.) Yes, my dear brethren, that is the name of Christ's own city, as St. Matthew calls it—Capharnaum.

We all naturally envy such a favoured place, and wish we had the chances, the lessons, the sight of those wondrous miracles with which its people were blessed.

But, my dear brethren, this is not all about Capharnaum. Turn over two chapters in St. Matthew's Gospel, in which our Lord sent the disciples to preach, and John the Baptist from prison sent to ask if He was the Saviour that was to come. Then you will read these words: "Then began He to upbraid the cities, wherein were done most of His miracles, for that they had not done penance. . . . And thou, Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? thou shalt go down even into hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, perhaps it had remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." (Matt. xi. 20-24.)

Is there anything, my dear brethren, more dreadful, more terrifying than these words of our Saviour to those for whom He had done so much? You see, God's graces and favours are not everything; they have to be gratefully received and faithfully acted up to. What instructions they had heard! What miracles they had witnessed! They had got used even to miracles, for our Lord said to them: "Amen, amen, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled." (John vi. 26.) What sordid motives led them to follow Christ! We could not have believed, had not He Himself declared it.

Let us turn and look upon our own selves. We, too, are "His own city." We, too, are His favoured ones, and which one of us has been always true to Christ? The children of God we are, and others know Him not. We have our home in this His own city, the Church. His miracles were wrought for our instruction, and some of them were only mere figures of what has been worked in our souls.

For instance, our Lord seemed to forget, when the man sick of the palsy was brought to Him; for He said: "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and not a word about his cure. Our Lord did not forget; He was thinking of us, and how that wonder of forgiveness would be renewed countless times for us. Again, when He blessed the loaves and fed the multitude, He had us—ourselves—in His blessed mind and heart. Please God, He did not see us murmur and leave Him when He explained the Blessed Sacrament! But those who receive the Blessed Eucharist so seldom, who are careless about Mass, are they not amongst those who "walked no more with Him"? (John vi. 67.)

So, to be Catholics, to profess the right religion, to listen, to attend, is not enough, and will not save us from being denounced as Capharnaum was. All the we came upon it "because they had not done penance." (Matt. xi. 20.) They had not turned from their sins, repented of them, amended their lives. We cannot live in sin, and be friends with God. Turn from sin, do God's holy will, and obey the Church.

Let us be grateful indeed for this example of Capharnaum. There is still time for us to profit from it. Our Blessed Saviour does not wish to denounce us and condemn us. He wants us to be faithful to Him, love Him, and be saved.

The same chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel bears me out in this. For what did our Lord add after His angry words? His Sacred Heart seemed to check His anger, and after a few lines we read: "Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up My

yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart; For My yoke is sweet, and My burden light." (Matt. xi. 28-30.)

Grateful for having been chosen as His own, cheerfully give yourselves to His service. Be nothing daunted. He will be ever near us, that we may learn of Him. Manfully take up His yoke upon you, and the blessing of obedience in so doing will make the yoke sweet and the burden light.

TEMPERANCE

TWO YEARS WITHOUT VODKA

A Russia without vodka was once considered impossible. Then came the drastic order of July 29, 1914, and vodka disappeared as if by magic. "There were entire drunken villages, drunken cities, a drunken army, a drunken Russia," writes a Petrograd correspondent, whose comments are quoted in the Literary Digest. What would have happened if vodka had not been prohibited? A representative of the Duma declared that the very thought of the "fateful consequences on the battlefields and in the country itself of a continuation of the inveterate alcohol regime makes every patriot shudder."

And now after a test of two years figures are given to show that since his vodka was shut away from him, the workingman's producing capacity has increased 15%. Monday, the day when millions of farmers were found in the gutters, has become a normal working day. City life too has been transformed. Schools, savings banks, co-operative societies, are sought by the masses. The very appearance of the people on the streets has changed. The Petrograd correspondent states:

"How quickly the population grasped the prospective benefits of the great reform is best shown by the fact that when it became known that the Imperial ukase, in order to become legally valid, will need the express consent of the majority of the farmers, only an exceedingly low percentage, refused the indorsement."

"January last (1916) the Zemstvo (County Assembly) of Moscow circulated the peasants in order to ascertain in the most direct possible way the impression of the population. A few of the replies made by the village elders, most of them as illiterate as their charges, have a great economic and psychological value."

"The men feel stronger. Their treatment of their women folk and attitude toward their neighbors is not the same as before."

"The children are now nicely dressed and have even shoes on their feet. One hears no more quarrelling in the izbas (farmhouses)."

"I was amazed to find among our farmers some who subscribe to newspapers."

"The people have become more honest."

"There are, however, some who do not give up all hope to see again the vodka bottle in its ancient glory. The war will end with our victory: our heroes will return, and then, of course, moderately, one will have to drink again."

There are some malcontents of course—idle farm-hands and city loafers chiefly—but their protests are of no account, and their efforts are directed towards procuring substitutes other than those offered by the Government, which include tea-houses, clubs, theatres, moving pictures, etc. The Russian women rejoice in the revolution in home conditions that the absence of vodka has brought about.

"Nobody has so quickly and completely grasped the import of the social revolution as woman, the greatest sufferer from the old alcohol curse," says the writer. "We are therefore, not astonished to learn that as soon as the saloons were definitely closed the peasant women marched to the churches in Indian file to burn a candle each, thanking the Lord for the great delivery."

"When, last spring, the question of re-permitting the sale of beer and red wine came up in the Duma, Tarasov, a farmer-deputy exclaimed: 'If the women would hear you, they would pull you down from this platform.'"

Here is one good result, at least from the evils of War. May every nation engaged in the conflict emerge from it with some such distinct benefit as accrued to Russia.—St. Paul Bulletin.

THE VATICAN AND THE MISSING

A visitor to Rome, to whom the Vatican, as it was before the War, was familiar, would find that an entirely new department had been added, the Tablet says. The new department is the Bureau of the Provisionary Office. Two Papal guards ask the caller's business, and if it bears on the Bureau, and is urgent, this writer tells us:

"He will be conducted up another staircase to the highest story of the Vatican, and ushered into the Provisionary Office itself. He will see the suite of rooms, three in number, whose windows overlook an extensive view of Rome, and receive floods of sunlight during many hours of the day. The walls of the rooms are lined with cupboards containing many drawers, and in the centre of the floor stand long tables covered with green cloth. At these tables there are some twenty secretaries—ecclesiastics, religious, laymen—constantly employed in reading and writing letters, in answering personal questions, noting down facts

and classifying information. The inquirer makes his statement, and if this is his first visit, the particulars of his case are taken. If he has already been here before, then in a moment the folio containing his business is brought forward, and whatever further information he has to give is added. Thus the hundreds, the thousands, of different cases are all kept in perfect order and detail, and unstinted care and trouble is spent over each. The applicant knows that whoever he may be and from wherever he may come, no pains will be spared in helping him."

HOW THE WORK BEGAN

And all this work is concerned with war prisoners. The Tablet writes of its aim and growth:

"The work carried on within the walls of these three rooms has now become almost world-wide in its scope. Like many another institution its origin was merely the response to a crying need of the moment, and as from day to day the need increased, it developed, until at last it has become organized into a perfect bureau of information and assistance. It began in 1914, after the early battles of the War, when numerous letters were addressed to the Vatican by the relatives of soldiers who had been made prisoners, or who had disappeared, and of whom news was impossible to be obtained by their families. Many of these letters were addressed personally to the Pope, who opened them himself. Having read them he wrote across the envelopes a word to classify the case, and passed them on to the ordinary employees of the Secretariate of State to be dealt with. With the progress of the War labors arising from these incessant and increasing inquiries became greater, and the persons deputed to cope with them had still to perform their usual official work."

"Then it was that Monsignor Tedeschi suggested the forming of a special bureau to undertake the whole business arising out of these applications for information and assistance. The Pope agreeing to the suggestion, the plan was immediately put into execution. On account of their knowledge of many languages, the Penitentiaries of St. Peter's were associated at once with the scheme. Mr. Bellamy Storer, formerly United States Ambassador to the Holy See, gave invaluable assistance, and the nuns of several convents offered their services for the copying of letters and the registering of lists. In a short time the organization was under way."

MORE AGENCIES OPENED

It was soon apparent however that other agencies must be established to cooperate with the Bureau, so the Pope instructed Monsignor Schulte to found one at Paderborn, and the Bishop of Geneva to found one at Freiburg. By March, 1915, regular communication was established among the three centres, the names of lost combatants were forwarded to the different countries, and the information secured was forwarded promptly to the enquirers. Both French and German Governments authorized the arrangements.

MORE PRACTICAL FEATURES

The entrance of Italy into the War greatly increased the work at the Vatican Bureau, larger quarters were secured and more employees were added to the staff. Shortly the work took on new features:

"Concerned at first mainly in obtaining information about prisoners, and about soldiers who had disappeared, the Provisionary Office has taken many other very practical steps for the mitigation of the difficulties of the situation. In the early part of last year the Rev. P. Huisman, a Dutch Franciscan, was sent as a delegate to Austria to visit the Italian military and civil prisoners, and while he was there he arranged with the authorities that all possible information concerning prisoners taken, soldiers killed and

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disappeared should be carefully collected. A bureau was established in Vienna to deal with this information, and it was agreed that every ten days a list of names should be sent to the Vatican, and from time to time a statement about their health, and wants, signed by the prisoners themselves, forwarded also. The Papal Nuncio at Vienna, during the course of 1916, visited the Italian prisoners in Austria. In Switzerland the prisoners have been visited by the Papal Delegate, Monsignor Marchetti. French and Belgian prisoners in Germany have been visited by two Swiss Papal Delegates. English prisoners have been visited by others. As to the Austrian prisoners in Italy, each Bishop was ordered to visit those in his diocese and to furnish a statement of his visit to the Provisionary Office."

In October, 1915, as a result of an audience of two delegates from the Swiss Catholic Missions with the Pope, the Apostolic Delegate at Constantinople was commissioned to visit prisoners in Turkey, and report results to Rome.

RE-UNITING FAMILIES

Refugees and inhabitants of invaded countries have also applied to the Vatican for information about relatives from whom they had been separated and in some cases whole families have been re-united. On the lists in the Provisionary Office are names of men of all the nations involved in the War, including America.

"All sorts and kinds of demands are made, as may be gathered from the various sections into which the Department is divided—General Secretaryship, search for prisoners who have disappeared, recommendation of prisoners, information on state of prisoners, obtaining of documents of birth, marriage, death, interments in Switzerland, inter-

change of prisoners, and communications with families. The Pope continues to give his personal attention to the workings of the Provisionary Office, and he is regularly informed as to its details. Letters directly addressed to him he reads, and they come to him inscribed in all sorts of ways, such as "Monsieur le Pape a Rome." The expenses of the Department, which are considerable—as the Vatican does not enjoy postal franchise—are entirely defrayed by His Holiness.—Sacred Heart Review.

PIUS X. PREDICTED GREAT WAR

Cardinal Raphael Merry Del Val, ex-Secretary of State to the late Pope Pius X. narrates, says the Milan correspondent of the Daily Chronicle, a series of strange facts concerning that Pontiff's prophetic insight into the great world War.

"From the early part of the year 1910," says the Cardinal, "it frequently happened to me that during my morning audiences on State affairs, when I had communicated to him some piece of bad news, Pius X. would reply: 'It is sad tidings you bring me, yet it counts as nothing in the face of the big War I see looming up ahead.'"

"When two years later, news came of the outbreak of the Balkan struggle, I said to him, 'Alas! Holy Father, your predictions are verified. Behold, the outbursts of the frightful War you have so long feared.' To my astonishment he answered, without a moment's pause, 'No, no; this is not the one that stirs my fears.'"

And a little later, reuniting the subject, he exclaimed to me in impressive tones, 'Your Eminence, the great War is hurrying towards us. Believe me, we shall not pass through the year 1914.' 'But, Your Holiness,' I replied, 'there is absolutely nothing to justify such serious forebodings. Never were the chancelleries of Europe, one and all, so keen on keeping the peace.' 'Ah, Your Eminence,' replied the Pope, 'you are too much of an optimist.'"

"It is easy to imagine," comments the Cardinal, "how profoundly stirred were my emotions after repeated incidents of this kind. Then, when we got into June, 1914, and the Diplomatic Corps were quitting the Eternal City for the summer holidays, I remarked to the Pontiff how we had already navigated half the year, adding that not a single ambassador had expressed the slightest fear about complications or about his normal return to his post, and, moreover, that the season would soon be too advanced to think of embarking on a gigantic war."

"Pius X. listened attentively, shook his head incredulously, gazed into my eyes, and reiterated in accents of solemn certitude: 'Eminence, before these remaining months have fled Armageddon will have become a reality.'"

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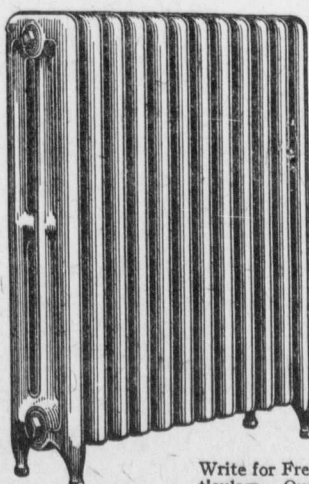
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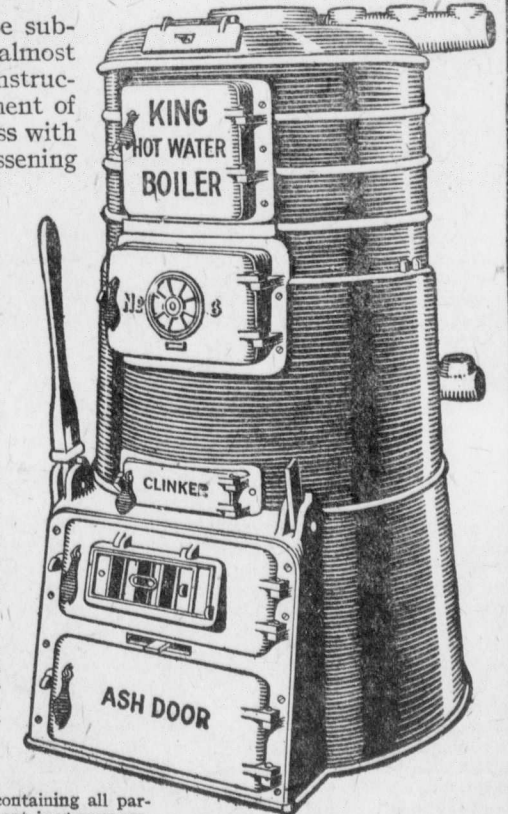
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