

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

THE LAW OF FASTING

"At that time Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil and when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry." (Matt. iv. 1-2)

Abstemiousness is one of the means of man's salvation. This would not have been so had he in the beginning remained faithful to God—though even then it was to some extent necessary, for the command God gave our first parents contained a negative as well as a positive element. Since man sinned however, and now suffers the consequences of his sin, he must abstain from certain things, as one of the principal ways of attaining his end. The commandments clearly express many of the things he must not do: he must not steal; he must not kill and so forth—a series of prohibitions that are familiar to every Christian. Conscience itself dictates to man that he must not indulge in anything for which his nature temporarily or habitually yearns. When he disobeys the commandments and the voice of his conscience, he sins, however strongly his inclinations may urge him on. To obey is not always pleasant to us, for often it requires sacrifices that nature rebels against making. Experience teaches us that we often fall because it is more pleasant, humanly speaking, to do a certain thing than to abstain from doing it. In like manner, it often is easier to do something that God commands than to abstain from something He commands us not to do. The things we are commanded to do often give nature satisfaction, and we would do them even were we not under the command. But since doing certain other things forbidden by God pleases us more in our lower nature, we find it difficult to abstain from them. While all this is true, naturally speaking, God's grace aids us; and, on the other hand, it makes us feel the sweetness of obedience to God in the denial of our illicit natural inclinations.

This is said of things that we should not do because the committing of them would be sinful. The Gospel suggests to us today the abstaining from things, not because they would be sinful in themselves, but because to do so would help us in our fight against our unlawful desires, and bring great blessings upon us. One of these mortifications, practised extensively among Christians, is fasting or abstaining from certain amounts of food—generally from the quantity that ordinarily would satisfy the hunger of a normal person. It is sin for a person to eat until his hunger is appeased. It is a duty for him to eat at least enough to enable him physically to perform his daily tasks; but it is meritorious for him to abstain from a part of it without injury to himself. His hunger may not be satisfied and he may not have been given the things that best suited his taste. But as long as it does not affect his health, or deprive him of the strength he needs for his labors, it is good for his spirit. The Church no doubt also had in mind, when forming her laws of fast and abstinence, the fact that if a person learns to deny himself lawful things that he easily could have or that he is accustomed to have, the more readily will he forego the satisfaction he would get from certain unlawful things. To fast and abstain helps to strengthen the will; it curbs the desires of nature, and is a form of penance, as well as an antidote to sin. Because it is usually a little difficult, makes it become more meritorious. Nevertheless, it is also meritorious to those who find its practice easy, because it is done in obedience to the command of the Church; and, even though it be not felt, it is a restraint on liberty, for a high cause.

The laws of fasting were more stringent in days gone by, because life then was not as strenuous as it is today, and because the faithful were more inclined toward such practices. Today these laws bind as ordered by the bishop of the diocese, and the obligations upon Christians to observe them is serious. No one should presume to dispense himself from these laws. There are reasons why some should be dispensed, but they must apply to their pastors or confessors for this dispensation. And he who really can not fast should feel that it is only this reason that prevents him from doing it; and he should make up for it in some other way. After the sacraments there is scarcely any help that enables man to do God's will more willingly, more generously, and to abstain more joyfully from things forbidden, as fasting. There is a wisdom far above that of earth, in this law of the Church. Having before her eyes the example of Christ, the apostles, and the saints, the Church, with a complete knowledge of the needs and of the welfare of man's soul, imposes upon us the obligation of fasting. True, it is that sorrows, disappointments, trials, and even want, are part of our lot in this vale of tears, yet these are not voluntary offerings to God. We can gain merit by resigning ourselves willingly to them, but ordinarily we would not suffer them if we could avoid it. And how few are really fully resigned under their weight! Although the voluntary offerings of the soul, heart, and body bring greater blessings to the Christian, let us thank God that we

can show our love of Him by turning even unavoidable sufferings into merit.

We live in an age of comforts. The eye can gaze upon wonders at little expense; the ear can be entertained as easily. We are brought to the beauties of other lands by stepping but a few yards from our doors. We are transported rapidly from street to street, city to city, country to country, without the least physical exertion on our part. In our houses, even when the night has set in, we live almost as by the light of day. We need not move from our home to converse with our relatives and friends—machinery, electricity, does it all. What is there we yet desire? Almost every comfort and facility that man could desire even in an age so enlightened in things material, he has within his reach. The forces of nature gradually are being more and more brought to light, and made to serve some purpose—for man. And he uses them all, as he delights in saying, "for the good of humanity."

In the midst of our plenty, we must not forget the way of the cross, for in it alone is salvation. While earth offers us all we reasonably can desire, let us not fail to remember that God is asking us for something in return. We must not ever and anon indulge in the luxuries of a day of plenty; but in a spirit of penance we must now and then deny ourselves, and compel some craving to remain unsatisfied. The promised land is not here, though it may seem to be; and we have a long journey yet to make through a desert. The Church gives us many opportunities of practicing self-denial; one is now at hand—the mortification of our appetites. Surely, in some way, we can take advantage of it; nay, generously embrace it.

A BLENDED TEA IS BETTER

Tea from one garden, no matter how fine it is, possesses certain desirable qualities but may lack others, because all characteristics are not developed under the same conditions. If the tea has a perfect flavor it may lack body; if it has body it is perhaps without the same perfection of flavor. To combine all desirable characteristics in one blend has been the work of the "Salada" Experts for over a quarter of a century and "Salada" is the fruit of their labors. The flavor is more delicious than any unblended tea grown.

THE LITTLE FLOWER OF JESUS

By the Right Rev. Thomas J. Shahan

The public and solemn veneration of our saints, their authorized invocation and their power of intercession with God do not rest on great external works, however wide and far-reaching their service and their fame. These are often, it is true, results, consequences of sanctity, which may, or not, come about, as it pleases that Divine Providence which orders the course of human events.

Christian sanctity is a highly personal matter. It argues the conformity of the soul with the Divine Will and is as full and genuine in the cloistered soul as in the founders of orders or the benefactors of humanity. When the Holy Father formally inscribes a person's name on the calendar of saints and assigns a day for the celebration of the feast, he deems it sufficient to know that the said person has practiced the virtues of faith, hope, and charity; of justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance, and that these virtues have been practiced in a heroic degree; that is, with extraordinary courage and resolution.

GOD CONFIRMS HER SANCTITY

All this is eminently true of the holy Carmelite of Lisieux, and in the long canonical process of her cause has been established according to strictest judicial rules. God, Himself, has confirmed abundantly, and confirms daily, the decision of His Vicegerent on earth by the numberless spiritual and temporal favors which he grants at the intercession of His faithful servant and by the miracles accomplished through her petition.

The life of a Carmelite nun, her daily round of duties, is itself a rugged way of holiness along which many souls have travelled with perfect loyalty to Jesus Christ, have mortified every inclination and impulse of nature and have reached the highest levels of the spiritual life. It is a life of perfect love of Jesus Christ, attained by prayer, meditation and contemplation by silence and fasting and self-denial, by the Divine Praises chanted in common, by penitential reparation of the world's sin and scandal and by prayerful devotion to the priestly office and to the salvation of souls.

The Carmelite life is saturated with the highest learning of sanctity, with the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas and such great scholastic doctors as St. Bonaventura, with the profound spiritual psychology of St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and many holy and wise writers, not to speak of the unshuffled tradition and spirit of an order that for over three centuries has cultivated in a high degree the mystical life, or intimate union of the soul with God. In the Carmel of Lisieux Sister Therese found the perfect atmosphere, the most favorable conditions for the resolute will to sanctity that distinguished

this fair child of grace from the tender budding of reason. If she is in heaven today, it is because she fulfilled, with heroic fidelity, letter and spirit, the holy rule of Carmel, and so justified before the world the loving choice which her Divine Spouse has made of her from earliest childhood.

CHIEF ASSET OF HER LIFE

In his eloquent summary of the Little Flower's life, Benedict XV, notes as the chief secret of the sanctity of Blessed Therese her devotion to the virtues of spiritual childhood, by which she means an absolute trust in God and a complete surrender of self to Him. Like the little child, shielded in its mothers arms, she faces the duties and labors of each day, fearless, because confiding in the goodness and mercy of God, in His infinite love, which so attracts her that she would spend eternal life in making others love Him. "I will spend my heaven in doing good upon earth," "After my death I will let fall a shower of roses," she writes, unconsciously perhaps of the perfect moral and humane beauty of her purpose, of its immense sympathy with all mankind, and of its conformity with the readiness of St. Paul to spend and be spent for His beloved flock. (II Cor. xii., 15).

HAD LITTLE GIRLISH WAYS

This complete trustfulness in the goodness and mercy of God; this absolute surrender of self to His love; this readiness to accept all suffering, she was wont to call her "little way." That is, with a certain girlish archness and playful humor, peculiar to her, and that lend a very human interest to her narrative, she hides beneath this humble formula profound truths of Christian spiritual discipline. From this angle her sacrifices, her sufferings, her trials seem to her little and ordinary. Her humility, in this respect, is so great that she seems dominated by a sense of her littleness, her insignificance before God. She is the Little Flower of Jesus, which blossoms for Him only, borrowing a lovely word from the letters of the blessed martyr, Theophane Venard; she is the plaything of Jesus, the little brush of Jesus to paint His virtues on the souls of her novices; the little child who strews flowers in the way of Jesus; she is a little grain of sand, a little victim of Divine Love.

All her services are little trifles; all her merits tiny ones. Her prophetic soul, however, beholds the uses of all this holy littleness, this total submission of self in the flood of Divine Love: "Of what avail to Thee, my Jesus, are my flowers and my songs? I know it well. This fragrant shower, these delicate petals of little price, these songs of love from a poor little heart like mine, will, nevertheless, be pleasing unto Thee. Trifles they are, but Thou wilt smile on them. The Church triumphant, stooping towards her child, will gather up these scattered rose leaves, and placing them in Thy Divine Hands, there to acquire an infinite value, will shower them on the Church suffering to extinguish its flames, and on the Church militant to obtain its victory."

MODEL OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

Blessed Therese is henceforth held up by Holy Church as a model of Christian virtue, a heroine of Gospel truth and discipline. What lessons, therefore, has her life for Catholic men and women of today? Apart from her "little way" of absolute trust in the goodness and mercy of God and total surrender of self to the action of Divine Grace, she seems to confirm the great Christian law of rigorous fulfillment of the duties of our state of life.

For everyone there is a daily round of little duties, little labors, little sacrifices, little sufferings, the aggregate of which makes up for most of us the fullness of life. In themselves they seem insignificant, monotonous, colorless, but they can take on the highest use and can share a heavenly value, if they are performed in the spirit which moved the Blessed Therese to perform every act as though in the presence of God, under the eyes of her Divine Spouse, and as some small return for the infinite love He bestowed upon her. This would mean, of course, a conscious and persistent pre-occupation with our proper duties and the spirit of their performance, but it would also mean a corresponding withdrawal from purely secular concerns and anxiety and a growing attachment to those religious views of life and conduct which Holy Church never ceases to inculcate.

KNOW HOW TO SUFFER

Suffering, in one form or another, makes up no small portion of the common stock or stuff of life; the manner and spirit in which we bear it, as it falls upon us, affect our lives profoundly and the lives of all who come in contact with us. Few, indeed, are those who can bear suffering with stoic patience or can ignore its cruel impact on the soul. While the saints of God have always been good models of the right Christian attitude toward suffering, we have in the Blessed Therese an admirable example of how even tender youth can meet and conquer it, when sustained by love of Jesus Crucified and the contemplation of His incredible sufferings for love of us.

Her brief life was crowned with suffering; the partings from her father and sisters almost intolerable to a soul of such exquisite refinement of feeling. To St. Therese

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herself such partings seemed like death; the long stretches of spiritual dryness akin to abandonment by God; the cruel night of the soul, when heaven itself, her one abiding passion seemed to fall away from her; her temptations against Faith most painful for a conscience so delicate; the physical sufferings of her long illness. Through all her sufferings she saw ever her Master and Model, the Divine Sufferer on the Cross, and offered herself as a victim of His great love, as one willing to share, as far as she might, the agony of the Passion and to make up in her person, with St. Paul, whatever might be lacking to the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

ALWAYS REMAINED TRANQUIL

Despite her many and constant sufferings we are told by Benedict XV, that there was never the slightest alteration in her tranquillity; nor did the multiplicity of the demands made upon her ever bring to her lips one word of impatience. The small trials of the common life, very severe on occasion in the sequestered existence of the convent, never destroyed her calm self-possession, and furnished often occasions of profound edification to her companions. The Cross of Jesus seemed to shine luminously through the frail tenement of her soul, and to bless and encourage the entire Carmel. Does not the life of this holy child rebuke our modern restlessness and self-seeking, our universal vainglory and our thirst for material pleasures, out of which crop up so often the only true and real sufferings, those of an unsubdued body and a heart that has lost all self-control.

PROTESTANT FAITH AN ANTI-CLIMAX

Mr. Chesterton, on being asked "In what way is your faith different now that you have joined the Catholic Church?"—gave this reply: Long before he became a Catholic, he said, he had believed in the divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, because he was more and more coming into His orbit. But if there had been nobody in the world but Non-conformists he did not think he would have come to that faith. "I can never help feeling," he went on, "that the Protestant faith in Our Lord, though a perfectly noble and beautiful sincere thing, does involve something very like an anticlimax. I find it much easier, personally, to believe in transubstantiation than to believe that a particular historical character was divine. If I were going merely by my own reason and instincts, the Protestant would appear to be the more difficult of the two. If I believed that God Almighty did indeed come upon earth in human form, I confess it would always seem to me to approach to pathos and blasphemy to suppose that He should merely appear and disappear. It is much more easy to believe that He left behind Him something almost as mighty and monumental as His own memory."

CATHOLIC AUTHOR OF THE FIRST TREATISE ON ENGLISH LAW

The memory of Henry of Bracton, the famous Catholic jurist, was honored by the inauguration; in his honor, of the Department of Law at the University College (Exeter) of the South West. Bracton was at one time Archdeacon of Barnstaple and Chancellor of Exeter Cathedral in the good old Catholic days, and was the author of the first systematic treatise on English law. When a memorial stone was laid last April on the spot where once stood Bracton's altar in Exeter Cathedral, it was decided to establish a lectureship for students of the legal profession in connection with the University of the South West of Exeter. The suggestion was taken up with enthusiasm and a substantial grant at once promised by the Law Society.

The special point of interest to Catholics is that, after six and a half centuries, a Catholic dignitary of Exeter Cathedral is being honored after this fashion. He was buried in the nave of Exeter Cathedral before an altar dedicated to Our Lady, at which a daily Mass

was said for the benefit of his soul for the space of three centuries after his death. The altar came to be known as Bracton's Altar.—Southern Cross.

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