



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE

VOL. XVIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 31, 1868.

No. 51.

A BEAUTIFUL SERMON

BY THE RIGHT REV. DR. O'CONNOR, S. J. Preached in the Philadelphia Cathedral, July 12th. at the Consecration of Dr. Wm. O'Hara, as Bishop of Saratoga, and Dr. J. F. Shanahan as Bishop of Harrisburg.

(From the Philadelphia Catholic Standard.) You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savor, with what shall it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden upon by men.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.—Matthew 5, 13-14.

I need not say, beloved brethren, that the ceremony which has called us together to-day is one of unusual interest. The vast crowds here assembled, the vivid interest marked on your countenances assure me that you appreciate it as I do.

It is always a solemn thing to witness the transmission of the Apostolic office—an act by which the Church renews her vigor, provides for her preservation or her expansion. As the plants throw out the seeds that produce other plants according to their kind which take their places when they have decayed, or rise up at their sides ravalling the fruitfulness of the parent stock, so the Church, organized by Christ, preserves her life and integrity and meets the exigencies of the hour by the transmission of the Apostolic office, with all its duties, its graces, and its responsibility—from those who hold it one day to others duly appointed to exercise it on the morrow.

This act, at all times interesting, becomes doubly so when, as is the case to-day, it is performed, not to fill a vacuum created by death, but to provide for growing expansion. The Church is then extending her tubercles, she is establishing new centres of action. Two new constellations, as it were, are to-day being set in the ecclesiastical firmament. This cathedral, the mother of the churches of this vast diocese, becomes on this day in a higher sense a mother. Two of her daughters take rank at her side, and they also become mothers.

Be it that this happens more by the increase and diffusion of the members already belonging to the fold, than by the conversion of those who knew her not. Whether it be by conversion or by increase and diffusion, we must rejoice to see the Church of God multiplying and filling the earth in obedience to the command given by her Divine Founder.

But for you, Right Reverend Fathers, whose light is this day set on the candlestick, on whose souls God places a seal that distinguishes you from all other men, now and forever more, it is an occasion of special interest. Christ this day makes you commanders of His hosts, with all the powers and all the graces attached to that high position. The Church, which is His agent in this great work, has endeavored to impress these upon you in the beautiful ceremonial which we have just witnessed, fraught, like all her other ceremonies, with instruction and power, and your deeply affected countenances, and the tear trickling down your cheeks assure us that you have entered into the lesson.

Methods I shall correspond best with the designs of the Church and with your wishes by making the words that proceed from this chair to-day be animated by the same spirit. Henceforth your lives will be devoted for the benefit of others. This people will be satisfied to-day with the advantages reflected by what shall be directly addressed to you for your own immediate benefit.

The words of my text suggest all I intend saying to you: 'You are the salt of the earth,' 'You are the light of the world.' 'So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.' I will speak to you of the name of your office, and the obligations it brings with it.

To understand the nature of the office confided to you, we must go back to that day when our blessed Saviour, surrounded by His disciples, from whom he was about to withdraw His visible presence, addressed them, saying: 'All power is given to me in heaven and in earth, go ye, therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.' It was on that day that the body was organized; into which you are incorporated.

The Redemption of the world was undoubtedly the greatest work of the Most High, its execution that nearest to the heart of God, and most closely connected with the true interests of his creature. This had been accomplished on Calvary as far as paying the price of our salvation, offering an atonement for all our sins.

But the graces thus purchased had to be applied to the souls of men. This, which is the work of God as much as the offering of the atonement, of our Blessed Saviour was not pleased to perform by his own immediate agency. He had, indeed, proposed His holy doctrines, he had wrought wonders to confirm their truth, and laid down His life to open for us the heaven that we had forfeited. He arose again and gave proof of his resurrection to the witnesses chosen to testify its truth to the world. But he did not by his own immediate ministry bring home to the souls of many the light of truth and the saving influences that he had established. This latter work he was pleased to perform through the agency of frail mortals, acting by his authority, strengthened by his grace. And oh! what a work, and clearly its performance shows forth the power, the goodness, the mercy of God.

The whole world, we may say, lay buried in darkness as hideous as it was baneful. Even the light that had been set up amongst his chosen people had become but as a faint glimmering about to be extinguished. Elsewhere the foulest impiety had been enthroned. The human race had run its course, and in every form of social life, and under every grade of human culture, had not only shown itself unable to relieve its own wants, but was plunging deeper and deeper every day into the abyss. Human misery seemed only to fatten on the corruption that it produced, and even human institutions were about to be swallowed up in the universal disorder. Men made to the image of God seemed changed rather into the image of demons and to be engaged in little else than in fitting themselves for that hell that was every day opening wider its jaws.

It was into this festering mass that our Blessed Saviour launched that institution that would plant life in the midst of death, and rival, or rather excel, and in a higher order the work which He performed in the beginning of the world, when 'the Spirit moved on the waters,' and He said, 'let light be made, and light was made.'

Yes, beloved brethren, the change operated by God in the redemption of the world, is a work more noble than was its first creation. To this there was no obstacle but the inability of that which had not being; to the other there was not only an inability as great, there was the opposite tendency of evil, and the greater height to which redeemed man was to be elevated.

This great work our blessed Saviour was pleased but to commence while he was visibly present on this earth. He carried on His beneficent designs fully only through the Apostolic body to whom He gave the commission and the promise, 'go, teach, baptize, and lo! I am with you.' To enable them to fulfil the one, and as a pledge that He would fulfil the other, He sent His Holy Spirit imparting Him to them in His fullness, and at once thousands are brought within the pale of salvation, and its boundaries go on extending until soon they become co-extensive with those of the earth.

This work was prefigured by the priesthood of the Old Law, when bearing the ark of the Lord they stood in the bed of the Jordan until the people passed over with dry foot. The waters that were below them rolled on to the sea, those that were above came rushing and roaring, but they stood together upon a heap, and rising up, and up, and swelling, like a mountain, were seen afar off. But they remained as a wall until the people passed over into the promised land.

Or it may be compared to the action of the priests of the Lord who went seven times round and about the walls of Jericho and blew their trumpets, and the walls of the city fell down and all the people entered. The men of Jericho trusted in their towers and their fences, but the blast of the trumpet, not the engine of war, was the instrument which God was pleased to use for their destruction.

These things, as all else, happened to that people in figure. They were but a type of what God did under the new dispensation. The tide of wickedness which was overwhelming the world was arrested by the men whom God commanded to go forth into its midst. It continued indeed to roll and to threaten and to swell up its waters so that those who looked on without faith, seeing all its accumulated fury, might have anticipated nothing but certain and sneaky ruin. — But God placed limits to its ravages, and forced it to lie back until His benevolent designs on His people were accomplished. Men trusted in the sword, and in the ramparts within which iniquity had entrenched itself, but the heralds of His Gospel armed only with the voice of truth and proclaiming its saving message made these ramparts fall down and the Church of Jesus Christ was established in every clime. God alone, it is true, was able to effect such results, but He was pleased to produce them through the labors of the men whom He sent to teach, to baptize, with whom He promised to be to the consummation of ages.

'They were 'the salt of the earth,' 'the light

of the world.' The Incarnate God so made them. It was through them that He dissipated the darkness that was brooding over the world, it was through them that He willed to give life and purity to that mass of corruption into which the human race had degenerated. Even the institutions directed for their temporal welfare were saved by the same agency.

It is into this body, Rt. Rev. Fathers, that you are incorporated to-day. For the Apostolic office which Christ instituted was not a passing thing. Like the evil that was to be encountered and mastered, it was to last forever; Christ promised 'to be with it all days even to the consummation of ages. It must, therefore, have been intended by Him to remain itself all days to that end. The first eleven whom He addressed associated others with themselves in the great work, and then paid the debt of nature.— But the body that had been then established remained. As, in the physical order, while the several particles of which each body is composed are perpetually disappearing and making way for others that take their places, the body itself continuing in all its natural properties and functions, so while the members of the mystical body of Christ, which is His Church, are ever giving way and replaced by others, the body itself continues the sublime functions assigned to it by its founder.

This perpetuation by the Apostolic ministry has ever been effected by the laying on of hands, by those who rightfully exercise the office.— Thus Paul transmitted it to Timothy, thus he commanded him to transmit it to other faithful men, thus it has been transmitted in unbroken succession to the Pontiff who to-day lays hands and transmits it to you. And it is your great privilege not merely to receive the rite but to be able to point to the important fact that you receive it as faithful men resolved to keep the deposit entrusted to you and that you receive it through a succession of men equally faithful who preserved what was confided to them in their respective generations — that you receive it not from men who took up the office uncalled, men whom the Apostle describes as 'ravening wolves,' nor from men belonging to that class which he also alluded to who though once of the true fold, spoke 'perverse things' to draw disciples after them. Oh! were you even able to point to an unbroken chain, connecting you through the external rite, with the Apostles themselves, if any link consisted of a man who had made to himself disciples — that is, instead of preserving and transmitting the deposit as he had received it, had sought to establish opinions of his own and enlist others in their support, that man should be branded as one who had spoken 'perverse things,' and your connection with him would only make you partakers of his crime. It would but aggravate impiety by treachery.— Against such, St. Paul warned his faithful followers to beware, and St. Jude marked their distinguishing trait, when he said, 'They are they who separate themselves.'

But in being lawfully incorporated into that body whose maxim is, and whose maxim and practice have ever been to adhere to the faith once delivered to the saints, you, Right Rev. Fathers, are engrained into that body to which Jesus Christ gave the commission. You too in your day are 'the salt of the earth,' 'the light of the world.' You are called to be the agents and instruments of Christ in his designs for the salvation of the world—an office which St. Paul does not hesitate to designate by the startling title of 'helpers of God.'

'Helpers of God,'—that is, his agents and instruments, and freely co-operating with him in that work which he prized so highly, on which His heart was set from eternity, agents and instruments in that work which His Incarnate Son proposed to Himself in coming down to this earth, for which he labored and died, but which He brings into actual effect and completion through you and your free co-operation, so that if you fail, His eternal designs and beneficent longings and labors are to a certain extent frustrated, whereas when you are faithful, your work is the very work of God that which of all others He prizes most.

It is true that all the priests of God are in many respects like you, His agents and His instruments in this noble work: nay, they are your equals in that which is most sublime—the offering of the great sacrifice and the administration of the sacraments. But besides your possessing this power in its fulness, it is under the authority of your order that all others discharge their duties. You, in your respective spheres, will be the soul of that phalanx that goes forth to the work of God. It is for you to assign to each one his sphere of action, it is for you to quicken, and rule, and direct; to be the eye that sees all, that watches over all, that is accountable to God, and responsible to men for all. To you alone belongs that authority that is the guardian and to the world the pledge of their faith adherence to duty.

We have only to consider the various figures under which the Church of God and your relation to it are represented, to have a proper idea of the sacred character of your sacred office.— The Church is represented as the spouse of Jesus Christ—pure and spotless—her purity is placed under your guardianship. It is for you, with the powerful weapons which God has placed in your hands to war against all who would tarnish her beauty. The Church is represented as an army in battle array. You are not mere soldiers fighting in her ranks, nor mere subalterns animating others to bravery. You have each the command of a whole army, and it depends on you in a great measure whether it shall march on to victory or destruction. It is not indeed an army detached from other armies similarly manned and officered, it is one of many engaged in the same service, fighting for the same cause, and all under the supervision of a general chief. But a whole corps is under your supervision and direction. If in the commander there fails vigilance or singleness of purpose, or devotedness, it will be vain to expect victory through the bravery of those in inferior positions. Though solitary bands may escape, nothing but ruin awaits the host. The Church is a ship bearing a precious freight through the troubled sea of this world to the heavenly port. You are its pilots, obliged indeed to sail in a squadron with others all pursuing the same course, and bound to the same destination. But, oh! if you fail in a vigilant eye, or steady hand, what can be expected but that your own ship will be wrecked amidst the rocks and the quicksands, and that confusion be cast amongst those by whom you are accompanied. The Church is a body—the body of Christ. You are its most noble members, those through whom the rest receive power, vigor, nourishment. You are the arm to defend it, the eye to watch over it, the heart that sends forth life to its remote extremities. The Church is a house—the house of God—you are stewards in that house, unto whose charge are committed all its treasures. It is a temple—the temple of the living God—you are the pillars on which it rests.

Great is the dignity of man, from the mere fact that he is made to the image of God; greater inasmuch as he has been engrained on Jesus Christ and lives by his life, 'made partaker of the Divine nature.' What shall we say of you whom God has brought so near to Himself, whom He has called to such close union and co-operation with Him in the greatest of His works, to whom He grants, I may say, a participation of many of His most noble attributes?

'A helper of God,' and that in the most noble of His works. Is not this alone enough to overwhelm us with confusion? What He came down from Heaven to accomplish, He is pleased to accomplish chiefly through you.

'The light of the world.' He Himself was the light, 'the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world.' Yet now He who is light and truth saith to you also, 'you are the light of the world,' for such He is pleased to make you.

'The salt of the earth.' It was He and He alone who could give it. Yet He now communicates to you also this property. Through you is the corrupt mass of the world to be leavened—through you He is pleased to impart to the weak and to the dead the vivifying power that will fit them for Heaven.

God has left many spiritual blessings to man, and you are 'their dispensers.' You are 'ambassadors for Christ.' Your commission is not written on a parchment that might perish, nor sealed with a wax that might be counterfeited or effaced. It is written in the bright light of God's word, and sealed by His Omnipotence.

The 'ministry of reconciliation' which is one of His own primary functions, 'He gave to us' also, says the Apostle, and when He 'shall sit on the seat of His Majesty,' He promises that those whom He has chosen to this office 'shall sit in twelve seats to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.'

No wonder that when He created an institution invested with such a commission, He appealed to that 'all-power' that was 'given Him in heaven and in earth,' or that He used those words fraught with such high meaning, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you. He that heareth you, heareth me; he who despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me.'

From this view of the nature of your functions. Rt. Rev. Fathers, it is easy to conclude what manner of men you should endeavor to be, and I put it forward chiefly for this purpose.— You are 'the light of the world,' you should be like the Baptist, a shining and burning light, spreading abroad the truth and enkindling in all the fire of divine love. How great must be the power of both in you, when from your flame they are to be imparted to many. 'You are the salt of the earth.' You must come in contact with the corruption of the world, and act on it with a power that will dissolve its baneful elements and impart to them a new nature. How great must

your virtue be to resist and overpower the mass of evil that we everywhere witness, or see threatening. Teaching is good. The truth which it imparts is the basis of the spiritual edifice that you must erect. But in the economy of Divine Providence the work is perfected by what I might call the process of transmission and imitation; that is, it will not be, by saying how men shall act that you will lead them to practical holiness, but by showing them this holiness in your lives, with a power that will make it loved and imitated. You will do in the spiritual what natural fathers do in the physical order, you will make others to your own likeness, and thus be their fathers in the order of grace.

This to be sure is above all the work of God. But as I have already stated, this work He performs through you, giving to your action a power of which it is itself incapable. He is acting in you and with you. The results when obtained are eminently His, for you are but weak instruments, entirely unable to effect them. But the action of God through you will not be effective except with your co-operation, and it will be abundant in proportion as you render yourselves worthy instruments. It is thus that in the wise but mysterious counsels of God you are 'the salt of the earth,' 'the light of the world.' And, oh! Rt. Rev. Fathers, what a responsibility to be thus accountable for the salvation of many and many souls redeemed by Jesus Christ, to feel that heaven will be peopled more fully in proportion as you are holy, that neglect to correspond to the invitation to holiness which God gives you may involve the eternal loss of many souls, which God wished sincerely to save, for which Christ shed His most precious blood, but which in His mysterious counsels He determined to save only through you—through your fidelity in corresponding to your vocation to holiness.

The offering of the Holy Sacrifice in which the priest by the power given by God causes the Body and Blood of Christ to be present on the Altar holds it in his hands, approaches it to his lips and offers it up to the Eternal Father, according to the declaration of the great Chrysostom, demands from him a holiness which should exceed in brightness that of the purest of the sun's rays. How much more is demanded from you, on whom so much depends, in whose holiness that of each priest should not only find a type, but should receive from it new vigor and lustre.

God required even the priests of the Old Law to be holy. 'Be ye holy,' He said to them, 'as I am holy.' In your more elevated sphere a holiness is demanded, which, as S. Chrysostom remarks, requires not merely that you be cleansed from sin, but that you possess an eminence and great excellence in all virtue, a richness in good works, which should be so great, as S. Basil says that 'if you stood in the midst of the Angelic hosts before the throne of God you should not fall short of them by comparison.'

It was the fear of failing to correspond to these high requirements of their state that made the saints tremble when called to this high office. They knew, indeed, they were called to be 'the salt of the earth,' 'the light of the world,' but they feared that the light might be changed in darkness, that the salt might lose its savor and be fit only to be trampled under foot. At this they trembled.

But that God who is rich in mercy has provided means by which all that He requires may be easily accomplished, so that you can now say with the Apostle, 'I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.'

When God commanded Moses to make for Him a tabernacle, with many things for the use of His sanctuary, he showed on the mountain a tabernacle to whose likeness he wished the other to be made, and he told him to look and make it according to the pattern that was shown him.— The same God requires of you to make for Him a sanctuary in your own souls, and to adorn it with many virtues. To enable you to succeed. He has provided for you, too, a model which he commands you to look on and then to form yourselves 'according to the pattern.' This model is Jesus Christ. He is not only a model showing what to do, but He is a power, enabling you to do it. Depending, then, on the aid of His grace, your great effort should ever be to look to Him, to study carefully His life, and labor to copy it in your own. His love and union with His Eternal Father, His burning zeal for the Father's glory, for the diffusion of His truth and holiness, His ardent desire, His never-ceasing labors for the salvation of men, His special love of the poor, the miserable, the wretched of all classes, His meekness, and patience, and modesty, and all His other virtues should ever be before your eyes, and as the lens seizing the sun's rays transfers the image of the natural object before it to the delicate plate, impressing on it every line and shade, and enabling it to reproduce them in many other faithful copies, so earnest and devout prayer will enable you to