

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

THE REV. F. P. HICKER, O. S. B. ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

OUR FAITH

"By which also you are saved." (I Cor. xv. 2) Faith, without which we cannot be saved, is the gift of God. And faith is the most necessary gift for us to possess, and the noblest gift that the Almighty can bestow upon us, for faith can lead us to life eternal. For faith to do this, we must have a knowledge of its doctrines, and we must strenuously live up to it.

Faith teaches us through the gospels. In the Gospel we can find all that it is necessary for us to know. And this knowledge is imparted to us in such a way that to know leads us to love and serve our good and merciful God. We adore one God in Three Persons—Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. We have taught that God the Son became Man, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Ghost. And His object in this—His Incarnation—was the Redemption of fallen man. The consummation of our Redemption was the Death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on Calvary.

But the gospels teach us, moreover, that during His life on earth our Blessed Lord and Saviour established His Church, which was commissioned to preach the Gospel to every living creature. This Church was fortified with the promise of Christ, that it should be imperishable; that the Holy Spirit should teach it all truth, and that He Himself would remain with it until the end of time. That this Church should continue in its blessed work of guarding the truth and saving souls, Christ appointed a Vicar, the head of the Church, Peter the rock, to whom His powers were delegated, for to him He gave the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven. Moreover, to seal us unto the Faith, and to strengthen us to act up to it, we are taught in the holy Gospel that Christ instituted the Seven Sacraments, by which grace is given to our souls. This power they have from their divine institution by Christ, the merits of whose precious Blood is applied by them to the souls of men. The first is Baptism, which cleanses us from original sin, makes us Christians, children of God, and members of His Church. We receive the Holy Ghost in Confirmation to make us strong and perfect Christians. In the Holy Eucharist, which is not only a Sacrament in which we receive the true Body and Blood of Christ, but a Sacrifice also, the Holy Mass, which is one and the same Sacrifice with that of the Cross.

The holy Gospel also hands down those blessed words of the Saviour: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them" (John xv. 22). How faith makes poor sinners cling in hope to this Sacrament of Penance. The sick and the dying are not forgotten in the list of Sacraments. The continuation of priests and bishops for the ministry is safeguarded by the Sacrament of Holy Orders; and family life is blessed and ennobled by the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Faith does not leave us lonely and unprotected in our daily life. How we should wander and lose our way, and be seduced by vain pleasures and pursuits on all sides, if our Faith let us forget God! But in the Gospel we are taught the duty of prayer—to raise up our minds and hearts to God. Our Blessed Lord Himself taught us how to pray! To lift up our souls to our Father in heaven; to do Him honor; to come to Him; to long for His Kingdom to come; to know that perfection is in doing His holy Will; to turn to Him for strength for soul and body; to be forgiving to others, as we pray Him to be forgiving to us. Oh! blessed prayer that thus directs our hearts and souls to God each day of life. "Pray always," says the Gospel; and our Blessed Lord gave us the example, praying for us on the mountain side the long night through. And we need not fear that our poor prayers will be of no avail, for we pray "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Remember His promises: "If you shall ask Me anything in My name, that I will do" (John xiv. 14). If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him" (Matt. vii. 11).

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Matt. vii. 7). The Gospel repeatedly assures us of blessed answers to our prayers. And most glorious too in the Gospel is that blessed assurance of eternal reward, if we keep steadfast to the Church, led on by our holy Faith. After the Last Supper, our Lord prayed thus: "Father, I will that where I am, they also, whom Thou hast given Me, may be with Me; that they may see My glory which Thou hast given Me" (John xvii. 24). But speaking as the Judge our divine Lord and King speaks thus: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the Kingdom prepared for you" (Matt. xxv. 34). Oh! how often have we prayed "Thy Kingdom come!" And thus our faith will be crowned in that eternal Kingdom of God.

Thus is our faith taught by the holy Gospel. Can it be that men, who once have been thus blessed with the sacred gift of faith, should fall away? It is, alas! too true. And for what have they abandoned their faith? That will be the remorse of it all throughout eternity. For what have they bartered their soul, their immortal soul, the soul that by faith was the child of God—the soul that had been redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ?

But many amongst us think but far too little of this gift of faith. There is something else that they prize still more. What can it be but something perishable, for this world passeth away, but faith leads to immortal glory. We then must treasure our faith, the blessed gift of God. We must know it thoroughly, follow its guidance, be loyal to it, and profess it openly. The Gospel and the Faith you have received, wherein you stand; by which also you are saved, if you hold fast." Remember, eternal life depends on that "if you hold fast."

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GENERAL INTENTION FOR AUGUST

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI.

CATHOLIC WRITERS The recent appointment of the gentle St. Francis of Sales as Patron of Catholic Writers, has drawn attention to a profession which we fear, is not appreciated at its just value, even by those who exercise it. When good and wise men wield the pen, this tiny instrument is, in the words of Cardinal Newman, the agency by which "the secrets of hearts are brought to light, pain of souls relieved, hidden grief carried off, sympathy conveyed, national character is fixed, a people speaks in the past and the future, and the East and West are brought into connection with each other." Great is the power of the pen; but few writers fully realize what it means to have thousands dipping daily into their prose, pondering their thoughts, analyzing their views, adopting their points of view. On the other hand, the masses are so accustomed to their daily meal of news, good, bad and indifferent, that they rarely ask whence it comes. They accept as a matter of course the opinions, arguments and conclusions of unknown writers, adopt them as their own, and rarely stop to consider the kind of people who are responsible for the output. Apparently the reading, and, we may add, the thinking, world is at the mercy of the writer.

There was a time when men yielded only to the sway of the sword. But those were the barbaric ages; other times other methods of procedure. In our days even the orator has to yield his pedestal to the wielder of the pen. The influence of the orator is limited to the range of his voice, no matter how stentorian it may be; while the influence of the writer has no limit but the world itself. The orator is still looked upon as an aristocrat among intellectuals, and may by the wizardry of words hold its hearers spellbound, convincing them meanwhile and moving them to action; but his hearers are always limited in numbers, and he has to depend upon some humble reporter to carry his words beyond the limits of his forum; he has to appeal to somebody's pen to convey his message not to hundreds but to hundreds of thousands. Orators are few and far between in our days, and oratory is a rare diversion; but everybody reads, and the wise ones who wish to reach the world's intellect are the most strenuous advocates of the pen.

While paying honest tribute to writers who realize their responsibilities and who, in the exercise of an honorable profession, teach according to their lights, one cannot give the same badge of conduct to all. It cannot be too widely known that while the men of the pen are purveyors of information to the human race, and moulders of public opinion, they may also be destroyers as well as builders-up of reputations, inculcators of vice as well as of virtue, breeders of hatred as well as of love among men.

We saw during the late War what propagandists could do in stirring up national hatreds, and we still see what they can do in the realms of religion and morality. Writers may be equipped with all the necessities of various brands give a bias to their prose, how can they be on the right side when treating religious or social questions? How can the Catholic Church expect a fair deal from such a class of men? When they are prejudiced they are unjust; when they are prejudiced and ignorant at the same time they

are simply blind leaders leading the blind.

Worldly wisdom, which they may possess in abundance and which is only too often the echo of pagan standards, will not carry the best-intentioned writer very far when discussing the Church or when treating questions that arise daily out of her relations with the world. Writers cannot teach what they do not know themselves; and yet the masses have a right to know the truth. The need is felt for Catholic writers, men willing to work for God and defend His Church, men well versed in the use of the pen, who can provide the right kind of intellectual food for thousands who are clamoring for the truth.

But proficiency in a Catholic writer presupposes cultivation of mind and heart. No profession demands a wider range of knowledge, more exact information, broader culture, or greater appreciation of the true value of things. "Before anything else," writes Pius XI. in his recent Encyclical, "they should endeavor with extreme diligence and as far as is in their power to possess the Catholic doctrine; it should beware of sinning against truth, and not for fear of offending opponents lessen or dissimulate it."

However, mere cultivation of mind and heart will not suffice. There are many learned Catholics in the world today; but unhappily their learning, it would seem, is all for themselves; it stays within the limits of their own brains. No one profits by it, for the reason that those very learned Catholics, having never learned how to use the pen, cannot communicate their knowledge. They refuse to give the time and labor required for this purpose, and the result is that with all their lore they remain dumb. Others, more generous, would willingly make the pen the instrument of their zeal, but they are not willing to make the sacrifice of time and labor necessary to acquire a style which would give them easier access to the public ear. In the writing profession, as in other avenues of life, men must creep before they walk, and figuratively speaking, walk before they run. In literature the public has become fastidious. Experts in style have attained its ear to harmony, and Catholic writers who look for success must follow the pace.

Knowledge alone will avail little unless our writers acquire a copious vocabulary, ease of expression, and knowledge of the value of language and facility in the use of it. Or as the Holy Father expresses it: "they should tend to the form and elegance of speech and strive to express thoughts clearly and in ornate language, so that their readers may be interested and enjoy truth all the more."

But how are we going to get those writers? Whence the source of supply? Sometimes the occasion reveals the man; a writer may discern a faculty that he was not aware of, and that is the dawning of a new vocation in life. But genius apart, for which no rules apply and no direction can be given, writers may be trained, but rarely with much success unless they are caught while they are young. Examples are few of men who take up this profession when advanced in life. Writing is hard labor; it is a form of human endeavor in which a man must earn his bread at the sweat of his brow, and the one who will undertake the task in earnest must begin early in life and resolve to persevere.

Only the enthusiasm of youth can be counted on to tap the unexplored sources. Colleges are splendid training grounds for budding writers. It is in the immature pages of college journals that the divine fire often sends forth its first scintillations. Well-conducted college journals are sources of untold good to the Catholic cause, for in them many able writers of the future may see themselves in print for the first time, while self-confidence is acquired and ambition is spurred on. Studious young men can see dawning a noble vocation, they had not dreamed of. It is then they seek seriously of launching out into the world of ideas, grappling with the great issues of faith and morality, and helping the spread of Christian culture and championing of good causes.

Future Catholic writers should consider the writing profession as a true vocation, one which for the opportunities it presents of doing good in the world of souls is, after the priesthood, the highest and most to be envied. Pius IX., in a letter to the Bishops of France, in 1854, asked them to give their attention to the value of the services of Catholic writers, "men imbued with the Catholic spirit and well grounded in letters and science who would consecrate their lives to the writing and publishing of books and papers in the defense of sound doctrines."

A score of years later his successor, Leo XIII., addressing the Bishops of Italy, was just as insistent on the value of the services which the Church has a right to expect from wielders of the pen. "The immense evil fostered by the bad press is daily gaining ground," he wrote; "this violence must cease. To the pen we must oppose the pen. This instrument so powerful for the raising of souls must be employed for the salvation of souls. Let the remedy for the evils we complain of flow from the very source whence the evils spring." The present Pontiff, in naming a heavenly patron for the profession,

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shows that he is fully alive to the importance of cultivating Catholic writers. Let us, therefore, pray fervently for this intention during the present month, and ask the Sacred Heart not merely to raise up a new generation of defenders of the faith, but also to strengthen those who are now engaged in breaking lances with the enemy. Those who are growing grey in the service will be also grateful for a prayerful souvenir from the members of our League.

ANTAGONISM TO TRUTH

The seed must be stuffed into the ground and die of rotteness before it can give birth to a blade of wheat.

So with the seed of truth. It must be buried away in the darkness before it can germinate—corruption, distortion, gestation, are conditions necessary for parturition, generation.

If it be an undoubted fact of science it would also seem a law in history. Truth which is a manifestation of God in life must more or less receive opposition from the world and hatred from men.

Furthermore it would seem at times to be part of the Eternal Design that the prophets of the truth should be stoned, exiled and cast upon heaps of dung.

What are men or systems in comparison with the greatness of truth? Christ's Body shackled with linen bands and sealed in a sepulchre is another picture of the grain of wheat falling into the ground to die, and bringing forth much fruit.

For do we not look to the decay of death for life, and to the gloom of the tomb for light? If an embodiment of ideas be the expression of God's own truth, it will eventually prevail in the face of opposition, intrigue, prejudice, misrepresentation. If this providential purpose is intended throughout the fabric of profane history, must we not believe that there is a more watchful care over the diviner truths—the corn of wheat sown in the sacred dust of Rome? Hardly had Christianity cast but a short shadow across the earth than St. Peter spilt his blood or when I drank from the fountains that gushed sweet water at the touch of St. Paul's head, so grossly severed from his body. No lover of the Holy Church of Rome can walk the streets of her capital without absorbing something of her magnificent composure.

It may be that alien hands will yet wrest from her keeping the choice relics of four centuries—but what of that? Even though the Pope were but a poverty-stricken pilgrim walking by the shores of the Tiber—he would still be the Vicar of Christ, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Christendom, the living mouth-piece of Christ in modern history. The principle ones admitted, it matters not how distressing the human element of the Church may be. Once we have expressed our unfeigned loyalty to the Throne of the Fisherman it is of little import whether men will cry: "He who passed is a false prophet—lo, there is the truth!" For us it is enough to believe that the Holy Church is the custodian of the Revelation of Christ and as the Book of Proverbs has it, "An obedient man shall speak of victory."

Father, the Pope. "And his place is in peace and his abode in Zion. There hath he broken the powers of bow, the shield, the sword and the battle. Thou enlightenest, wonderfully from the everlasting hills; all the foolish of heart were troubled. And his place is in peace and his abode in Zion. And his memory shall be in peace."—The Missionary.

RECALLS EVENTS IN LIFE OF THE FIRST MARTYR OF ENGLAND

Birmingham, July 12.—The feast of England's first martyr, to whose memory the famous Abbey of St. Albans was erected, was observed recently.

An old tradition says that Alban, who lived at the time of the tenth general persecution of Diocletian, sheltered a priest who was flying for his life. Alban was a pagan at the time, but was so impressed by the example of his guests that he embraced Christianity and was baptized by the priest.

Later, when Roman soldiers came to search his house, Alban, in the fervor of his new faith, disguised himself as the priest, and was arrested and condemned to death. On the way to the place of execution, it is said, Alban arrested the waters of a river in such a manner that they crossed dry shod, and also caused a fountain of water to flow on the summit of the hill where he was beheaded.

His executioner was converted. The man who replaced him, after striking the fatal blow, was punished with blindness. St. Alban has been venerated in England since the fifth century. He is usually represented in art with a cross in open hand and a sword in the other, with a river or a spring in the foreground.

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