

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

Rev. F. P. Hickey, O. S. B. SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

SUNDAY AFTER THE NEW YEAR

A GOOD BEGINNING "We should live soberly and justly, and godly in this world." (Titus ii, 12)

How clearly the words of the text, my dear brethren, ring out at the beginning of a New Year! St. Paul strikes the true note, and in these words teaches us how to start and how to persevere through the year, if we would please God. "We should live soberly, and justly, and godly in this world."

So it is not your priest, but St. Paul, who preaches to you to-day. And you see how his words of wisdom divide themselves naturally, and embrace all the duties of a good life—duties to ourselves, our neighbour, and Almighty God.

We should live soberly—that is, we have to keep ourselves under due restraint, our appetites, our desires, our minds, and tongues. The common meaning of soberly is carefulness against drink—not only against intemperance, drunkenness but against even the inebriation in our liking of drink, lest "we put an enemy into our mouths to steal away our brains." So, then, first we are bound to be sober as regards our appetites.

Then, to be sober-minded—on the guard against dissipation, giddy thoughtlessness, as if we had no soul to save, nothing more serious to do than enjoy life and have a good time. For following quickly on this would come sensuality, and our passions, unrestrained, would lead us to the worst excesses. Oh! the sins of youth, the impure thoughts, words, and deeds, because we had no restraint upon our desires and passions!

Our tongue, too, has to be sober and restrained. What an evil is an immoderate tongue! For the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.

An unquiet evil, full of deadly poison. (Jas. iii, 6, 8.) It is humbling indeed to find that St. James says that man can tame all kinds of beasts and serpents, "but the tongue no man can tame." (Ibid., 7, 8.)

"We should live soberly and justly," continues St. Paul; and this word embraces all the duties toward our neighbors. We feel as if this would apply to very few churchgoers; are we not all honest and respectable people?

Are we living justly if we needlessly get into debt? or being in debt, do we not try and plan and pinch ourselves to repay it? Are we living justly if we drive hard bargains and overreach our neighbour?

And there is more than his money that we can steal from our neighbour. There is his or her good name. And how is that stolen but by whispered calumny and detraction, by unkind gossip, by repeating ill-natured remarks? What misdeeds and enmities and crimes have been caused by malicious tongues! Who can look back and say, "I have always lived justly in this respect?" "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." (Jas. iii, 2.) Live justly towards our neighbours—and who such neighbours, bound so closely in love and responsibility to each other, as parents and children?

In justice, then, see that your children are brought up good Catholics, knowing and practicing their holy religion. In justice, keep a good and blameless home for them. In justice, give them good example, so that they cannot help but honour and obey you.

How much can St. Paul say in three words—soberly, justly, and godly! This old English word explains itself. It bids us be pious, reverent and obedient to God. There are pagans who have been sober and just; a Catholic must needs be godly as well. He has "to know, love, and serve God." To know Him, he must have been brought up in a Catholic school, prepared for the Sacraments and well grounded in his faith. And even in after-life, no one can despise sermons, instructions, and good books. For the more we know God, the more we shall love Him, and the less we shall love Him, the less we shall love Him. And yet our Blessed Lord has said: "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." Matt. xxii, 37. How thoroughly, then, should we know Him, if we have to love Him thus. This loving God is not a mere matter of sentiment, of devotion: it is "the greatest and the first commandment."

But how can one tell whether we do love God? We can test our love. Our Lord has said: "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." (John xiv, 21.) Keeping the commandments is serving God. So, unless we serve Him by obedience, serve Him by worship, serve Him by submission to His holy will, we do not love Him.

That word serve is one that most people do not like. Service is doing something that we are told, when we are told, and as we are told. And how we dislike that! But God is the Master, and does not reward us for doing what we like, but what He orders. And our holy religion in God's Name orders us to serve God, by prayer, attending Mass, receiving the Sacraments, keeping the commandments. This is serving God.

It is not, then, as easy as we perhaps thought "to live soberly, justly, and godly."—Not one of us could

persevere this year of himself. But St. Paul does not leave us with the bare command. What are his next words—the grand motive that should urge us on? "Looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus ii, 13.) That is the why and the wherefore that should make us live soberly, and justly, and godly; that should start us in this new year.

GENERAL INTENTION FOR JANUARY

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.

SALVATION OF THE DYING

In the beginning man was created to live forever, not to end this short life in death. That was God's decree when He placed him in this world. Man was given life to live it out; yet we know he dies. Every year a hundred thousand human beings—we ourselves shall soon be of the number—fall like blades of wheat before the sickle in the harvest time. Why is this? Because our first Parent became guilty of a grave sin. The disobedience committed in the Garden of Eden was a revolt of man against God, of the creature against the Creator. Adam's sin made his soul unfit for sanctifying grace; in other words, he expelled grace from his soul by his own act. If this had been the only result, his descendants might have become quickly reconciled to a personal act of the irrefragator; but unhappily, Adam's disobedience had consequences which have left their impress on the world. He was the juridical and moral representative of mankind; in him the whole human race existed in germ, and he transgressed a law binding the human race. His sin was the sin of mankind, because the actions and will of the head are the actions and will of the whole body.

The wages of sin is death. In order to punish Adam and his descendants, God deprived them of the strengthening agencies of the soul, thereby leaving the body to its own native weakness and a prey to dissolution. Since that first transgression humanity carries within itself the germ of death; as a result, an army of human beings are passing every day from this world into the next; they are gliding from this fugitive life into another life which never ends.

When a person is dying it is usual to say that he is in his agony. Why do we employ this expression? Because the word "agony" means a struggle or a combat; the agony which is the ordinary prelude of the last human sigh is nothing but the struggle between life and death; between life which wishes to continue living, and death which is determined to blot it out. Nature abhors the journey to eternity; it clings to life until it is no longer able to hold its own. When the vital spark is quenched, the separation of the soul from the body has taken place, the soul is winging its flight to judgment and the flesh of the body is waiting to return to dust. Death has won its victory—as easy victory, in all truth—for what is life but a bubble, that grows, glensens, and then bursts? What is this temporal life of ours but the short life of a flower that buds, blossoms, withers, and then disappears? Death is the price we are paying for the sin of Adam; the penalty that God exacts is the return of dust to dust.

And yet the physical struggle between life and death is only a thing of time, only a passing agony, a temporary act in the drama of existence; a day will come when life will again vivify the ashes of the dead. Another and far more bitter agony at the moment of death is the apprehension of what one is to meet hereafter, the moral struggle that takes place between the life which will last forever and the death which will never return. Eternal death is the separation of the soul from God, the final and hopeless separation from Him who is the very life of the soul in whom it lives and moves and has its being. With this separation looming up before them, we can well understand the intensity of the moral agony that accompanies the last moments of the dying. It is an awful struggle which takes place in the soul between the true and only life, which is of God, and the results of sin inherited from Adam which tries to hold the soul in revolt. Still, as man lives he is liable to die; as the tree falls so it shall lie. How many there are who live as if they had not to die, who go through life without ever recalling the end of it! How many are there to-day in sin, a state which is not merely the image of death, but death itself! Their souls are spiritually dead. "They seem to be living," says St. Augustine, "but it is only their house of flesh that lives; the inmate, the soul, is nothing but a corpse." And how easy it is for such souls to pass into the final state of death, many of them to-day possibly, without hope or means of recuperation unless our good prayers are offered for them.

Why are we asked to pray for the dying? Because there are thousands who live their lives neither fearing nor loving God, thousands who die daily without faith or the sacraments. There are among them a large number who stifle their conscience during life and who at the time of death do not show the contrite heart which is required for justification.

What is to be their fate when the dread hour comes? If the thought of death has made the saints shudder, even those who have grown old in prayer and penance, what should be the sentiments of those who have lived all their lives in indifference or in sin? Undoubtedly the Divine mercy are infinite, but the affair of salvation God requires the cooperation of His rational creatures; He will not save us without ourselves; and when the stricken soul is besieged by bodily pain, or disconcerted by the terrors of death, by temptations, and by the final efforts of the archenemy to secure his prey, there are many reasons to fear that the movements of parched and dying lips find no response in the heart.

We have here the reason why our prayers are asked for the dying, especially for those who are not praying for themselves. God wishes to save souls, all souls, each soul in particular. It was for souls that His Divine Son shed His precious Blood; and we should pray fervently and perseveringly that this precious blood may not have been shed in vain. While it is true that the prayers of the living may not have their infallible efficacy, since the will of the dying may persevere in evil, and while it is not probable that our prayers shall save the souls of the thousands who will die today, still it is morally certain that the suffrages of our millions of members, united with those of the rest of the Christian world, will have at the end of the day obtained marvelous results. Our prayers should be said especially for those souls who are dominated by apathy, or blinded by passion, false education, bad example, human respect and ignorance. Few people at the moment of death are knowingly and obstinately impious, and we may hope that their souls, being on the threshold of eternity, and feeling themselves alone and detached from the objects that held them to earth, the dormant impressions of a pious childhood, the instructions of a Christian mother, or the good examples of others, will come back to them from the depths of their memories. May we not have confidence also that the burning love of the Heart of Jesus, moved by our prayers, will second their feeble wills and will cause His mercy to lord it over His justice? The mercy of God is limitless; if human souls are loved by Him with a wonderful love, and His Divine power has at its disposal resources of infinite efficacy; in the twinkling of an eye He can inspire acts of sorrow. Let us lend our prayerful efforts, in union with His Sacred Heart, to triumph over death and help into Paradise many souls that might otherwise have been lost.

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MODERN "DISCOVERY" OF GOD

DR. JAMES J. WALSH CITES CASE OF NOTED ENGLISH NOVELIST

Probably the most interesting piece of recent popular literature, including even the "best sellers" is the very complete revolution of opinion and expression with regard to the existence of God and the place of religion in the world, that has come to be a keynote in some of it, at least, as a consequence of the War, says James J. Walsh, M. D., in "Home and Country." It has taken a close view of the meaning of suffering in the world, a stern personal presentation of that greatest of mysteries in the universe, the presence of evil, to wake people up to the foolishness of a superficial philosophy which thinks it can dispense with God. The English novelist, Mr. Wells, the English novelist, is the typical example of this change that has occurred. In his novel, "Mr. Britling Sees It Through," after suffering has come to himself, Mr. Britling says "Religion is the first thing and the last thing and until a man has found God and been found by God he begins at no beginning, he works to no end. This is indeed a striking expression from a writer who has been usually looked upon as the leader of those who thought such words as religion and God remnants of old-fashioned ignorance and superstition.

In his more recent book frankly entitled, "God, the Invisible King," Mr. Wells says in such emphatic words that his publishers quote the words as their best advertisement of it.

"The time draws near when mankind will awake . . . and then there will be no nationality in all the world, but humanity, and no king, no emperor or leader but the one God of mankind."

At the beginning of this War there were a number of people quite ready to proclaim that "The Great War" for it is literally the greatest conflict humanity has ever waged, represented the failure of Christianity, Gilbert Chesterton, the English essayist, said in his own striking way in reply, when people suggested that we had tried Christianity for 1900 years and it had failed—and now it was time to try something else: "Oh, no, that is just what we have not done; we have not

tried Christianity for 1900 years and now it is time for us to try Christianity."

Here now comes Mr. Wells with a formula that would put all humanity on the plane of brotherhood with only God above them—and what is that but Christianity? For, while Mr. Wells talks of "no king no emperor, no leader," he surely does not mean that man could get along without authorities under God to whom would be confided the exercise of the power needed to maintain order.

Before the War a great many of the intellectuals of mankind, at least those who, because they had had the opportunities for education, were inclined to think that they were the only ones who had the right to an opinion in these profound matters, were very much in the position outlined by Colton in his little book "Lacon" about 100 years ago. "Lacon" is a rather precious little volume which contains over so many truths that were rather unpalatable at the end of the 19th century, but are now coming back with a new significance. Colton said there are three arguments against the existence of God that are more powerful than any others. They are health, wealth and a number of friends. When a man has these he does not feel that he needs God, and when ever humanity does not need God human beings are rather inclined to neglect Him and very readily persuade themselves that they can get along without Him and even that there are three arguments against the existence of God that are more powerful than any others. They are health, wealth and a number of friends. When a man has these he does not feel that he needs God, and when ever humanity does not need God human beings are rather inclined to neglect Him and very readily persuade themselves that they can get along without Him and even that there are three arguments against the existence of God that are more powerful than any others. They are health, wealth and a number of friends. 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