

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

By Rev. N. M. REDMOND

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

MEANS TO "MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD"

"He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah." John 1, 23.

The sacred words of the prophet of old with which the hallowed voice of St. John made the wilderness ring, reminds us of the work that becomes us in this holy season. Whatever may be one's spiritual condition, by far the best means to "make straight the way of the Lord" is a sacramental confession, having all the requisite conditions of true penitence. We owe our best service to God. In this sacrament we are enabled to perceive the extent of our unfaithfulness. Hence, when the gravely sinful, but truly penitent, behold the dark picture of the past, they earnestly resolve on a life of grace for the future; when the tepid, but truly penitent, behold their sloth of the past, they resolve to be fervent in the future; and when the good behold the contrast between what they have been, and what they should have been, they resolve to be better in the future. This resolution, which is the soul of true repentance, is the effect of divine grace, and the influx of the justifying grace of the sacrament gives it a sacramental character. But the sacrament of penance ends not with this. It has yet to be completed in the life of the penitent. Satisfaction to God has yet to come. In its strict sacramental sense, this is the penance enjoined by the priest. In its wider sense it embraces all other spiritual means appropriate to this, or any other holy season. Only those, however, whatever may be our spiritual standing before God, who are contrite and who confess during Advent, will make the best and most fruitful use of these means. By contrition and confession we are stimulated with a hearty desire, strengthened by sacramental grace, to satisfy God's justice "by worthy fruits of repentance." The view which we get in the sacrament of the dark side of the past, teaches us the necessity of the satisfaction which should be made in the future. The truly penitent sensibly deem their whole future lives too short in which to make satisfaction to God. The justice of God is as great as His mercy. His mercy has never failed to proportion divine succor to the ordinary needs of each, neither will His justice ever fail to exact a proportion between sin and satisfaction. The terms of this proportion are shrouded in mystery. The truly wise, therefore, are those who dedicate their whole lives to works of satisfaction. They walk in the footsteps of their models of the past, who marked their lives with daily works of satisfaction, which bespeak their latent determination to be on the safe side, when justice would sift their lives. But to descend to particulars, let us see what should be the works of our lifelong satisfaction.

All, who have a feeling sense of the injustice which they have been guilty of toward God by the commission of mortal or venial sin, will not fail to recognize, that, after they have reached the happy point in their lives, in which, under the influence of God's grace, they resolve to lead better lives, that it is both reasonable and practical that they faithfully discharge all their duties as Christians. Sin, as we suppose, they have renounced. But if any affection for it remain, they should be prompt in stamping it out. Occasions of sin, they should dread and avoid, even though they be as dear to them as the right hand is to man. The observance of the commandments of God and the precepts of their lives. Trials they ought to receive as coming from God for their spiritual betterment. The discharge of the duties of their respective states in life, should be exact and conscientious. All ought to be done in a spirit of true Christian penance. Many, indeed, start out determined to fully comply with all these duties, but alas, not a few fail for want of that which we have yet to consider.

When we resolve on attaining an end, we ought also to lay hold of the means requisite to do so. Those who have failed in the present instance have fully verified this axiom. Determined on the end, they have neglected the means. The practice of the Christian duties to which we have adverted, supposes by the way of means, a regular and uniform devotion. As the duties adverted to, are essential in the service of God and the salvation of our souls, a regular and uniform devotion is of indispensable obligation. Through this channel must flow into our souls the graces, without which it will be impossible for us to execute our resolutions in the practice of those essential Christian duties. You may ask, what is meant by this regular and uniform devotion? We cannot enter into all its details. The chief branches of it are devout morning and evening prayer. Oh, that we had language sufficiently strong to emphasize the importance of this branch! It is of such that it is made light of by so many. A conscientious observance of Sunday and holy-days. Comment is unnecessary regarding the importance of this branch. To have for a daily companion some good book. Oh, what golden half hours are these spent in sweet converse with such a book! Finally, to frequently refo-

ify ourselves by the grace of the sacraments.

Oh, dear people, happy will it be for us, if in this manner we make the present Advent memorable as the season of our conversion to truly earnest Christian lives. Thus we will faithfully comply with the request of St. John in the holy words of Isaiah: "Make straight the way of the Lord."

TEMPERANCE

TOTAL ABSTINENCE OFFICERS

I note with interest that the officers' mess of the American Legion in the Canadian Army, otherwise known as the 97th battalion, is made up solely of total abstainers. The colonel, Rev. C. Seymour Bullock, sometime Unitarian minister in Ottawa, holds the contingent resignation of every officer, to become operative automatically if that officer takes to drink or immorality. Every man in the whole battalion of 1,200 is an American citizen, and four other battalions are now forming. The badge is a maple leaf bearing the arms of George Washington. It is to be remembered that during the Civil War 48,000 Canadians crossed the line to fight in the Union army, of whom 18,000 died in service. —Presbyter Ignatius, in the Living Church.

KEEPING OUT THE CAUSE

Nederland, the new boom town of Colorado, made famous and prosperous by the wealth that tungsten mining has been turning out, is the first of the Western boom towns to be without a saloon. And the Denver Catholic Register remarks:

"No matter whether one likes prohibition or not, he must agree that it is an excellent thing for Nederland. Imported intoxicants are common enough there, and drunken men are anything but rare, but the saloon is absent, and the murders that would inevitably result from such establishments in the high tensioned boom city have not been occurring. Nederland is one of the most interesting spots in America at the present time, and will undoubtedly have 50,000 to 100,000 tourist visitors this summer."

PROBABLY HAD RIGHT IDEA

A traveler entered an inn where a Quaker sat by the fire. Lifting a pair of green spectacles and rubbing his eyes, which looked very inflamed, the newcomer, in one breath, called for some brandy and made a grievous complaint about his eyes.

"They are getting weaker and weaker," he said. "And now even the spectacles appear to do no good." The Quaker looked first at him and then at the brandy.

"I tell thee, my friend, what I think," said he. "If thou wouldst wear thy spectacles over thy mouth for a few months, thine eyes would get well again." —St. Paul Bulletin.

SOME BRITISH TESTIMONIES

"Alcohol produces progressive paralysis of judgment, and this begins with the first glass." —H. Lander Brunton.

"Health will always be injured even by small doses of alcohol." —H. Allen Clark.

"Alcohol even in small quantities perverts the judgment and weakens self-control." —Dr. James Ritchie of Edinburgh.

"I have no hesitation in attributing a very large proportion of some of the most painful and dangerous maladies which have come under my notice (during more than twenty years of professional life), as well as those which every medical man has to treat, to the ordinary and daily use of fermented drinks taken in the quantity which is conventionally deemed moderate." —Sir Henry Thompson.

"Alcohol is a poison. In chemistry and physiology, this is its proper place. Many readers may receive this dogmatic assertion, therefore, with a 'Pooh, pooh! Fanaticism and folly! We know better! Let me support the assertion therefore with authority. The sedative action of alcohol on the brain,' says Christianson—and we know no higher authority either as regards poisons than the article of the materia medica—constitutes it a powerful narcotic poison." —The late Professor Miller, Edinburgh University. —St. Paul Bulletin.

REFORMATION WAS INTRODUCED BY FORCE

Froude (in "History of England," Vol. iv, p. 297.)

Describing the manner in which the English people rejoiced when Catholicism was restored to them under Queen Mary, Froude writes:

"The glad news spread like lightning through London, and the pent-up hearts of the citizens poured themselves out in a torrent of exultation. Above the human cries, the long-silent church bells clashed again into life; first began St. Paul's, where happy chance had saved them from destruction; then, one by one, every peal, which had been spared, caught up the sound, and through the summer evening, and the summer night, and all the next day, the metal tongues from tower and steeple gave voice to England's gladness. The lords, surrounded by the shouting multitude, walked in state to St. Paul's, where the choir again sang a Te Deum, and the unused organ rolled out once more its mighty volume of music. As they came out again at the close of the service, the apprentices were heaping piles of wood for bonfires

at the crossways. The citizens were spreading tables in the streets,

which their wives were loading with fattest cappons; there was free feasting for all comers, and social jealousies and religious hatreds were forgotten for the moment in the ecstasy of the common delight."

(This shows that the Reformation had been inflicted on the people by force.)—Our Sunday Visitor.

WHAT CATHOLIC EDUCATION DOES

Those unappreciative Catholics who do not properly value the parish school will profit by reading the opinion of the editor of a New England publication devoted to education. He says:

There is one Church which makes religion an essential in education, and that is the Catholic Church, in which the mothers teach their faith to the infants at the breast in their lullaby songs, and whose brotherhoods and sisterhoods and nuns imprint their religion on souls as indelibly as the diamond marks the hardest glass. They ingrain their faith in human beings when most plastic to the touch. Are they wrong, are they stupid, are they ignorant, that they found parish schools, convents, colleges, in which religion is taught? Not if a man be worth more than a dog, or the human soul, with eternity for duration, is of more value than the span of animal existence for a day. If they are right, then we are wrong. If our Puritan fathers were wise, then we are foolish; looking upon it as a mere speculative question, with their policy they will increase; with ours, we will decrease.

The writer then makes this forecast:

We are no prophet, but it does seem to us that Catholics, retaining their religious teaching and we our heathen schools, will gaze upon cathedral crosses all over New England when our meeting-houses will be turned into barns. Let them go on teaching their religion to the children, and let us go on educating our children in schools without a recognition of God and without the reading of the Bible, and they will plant corn and train grapes on the unknown graves of the Plymouth Pilgrims and of the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, and none will dispute their right of possession. We say this without expressing our own hopes or fears but as inevitable from the fact that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.

ACCESSIONS TO THE "ONE FOLD"

The publishers of the Official Catholic Directory are making a special effort to obtain from the diocesan chanceries reliable statistics regarding the number of converts annually received into the Church in the United States. Sixty-nine dioceses with a Catholic population of 8,082,900, reported 19,000 converts. At the same ratio, the remaining 32 dioceses, with a Catholic population of 8,481,500 should show a larger number, making a total of approximately 39,000. This is a matter of so much importance—as an evidence of the healthy growth of the Church and the vital appeal which her teaching makes to the non-Catholic world—that it is surprising how meager is the accurate information we have about it. We all know in a general way that no inconsiderable accessions to the ranks of the Church, through conversions, are made every year; but how great these accessions are we have no means of knowing with any degree of definiteness, because no concerted effort has been made throughout the country to gather reliable data on this point.

The Apostolic Mission House in Washington has tried for several years to secure information from its missionaries and others about the number of converts to Catholicity. It places the average yearly number of those who enter the "one fold" at about 40,000. An estimate made by the places the number of converts received into the Church in the United States during the year 1915 between 40,000 and 45,000. The pastors of parishes who are actively engaged in the work of the ministry on the firing line and who are brought into immediate and personal contact with those outside the Church, do not hesitate to say that this number falls far short of the reality. They judge from the number of converts made each year in their own and the neighboring parishes.

For many reasons it would be interesting to know just how many non-Catholics are received into the Church annually in this country. It would be invaluable as an indication of the "pulling power," so to speak, of Catholicism and a measure of the spiritual attraction which it has for the average Protestant. It would stimulate to greater effort the priests and people who are now striving with more or less success to place the claims of the Church, as a religious organization, more clearly before the non-Catholic world; and it would be an incentive to others to co-operate with them and add their mite to the work now being done along these lines.

Every Catholic is, or ought to be, a missionary to his non-Catholic friends, an apostle, or "one sent," to those who do not worship before his altar. This is especially true of the intelligent Catholic who cannot dissociate himself from the work of evangeliza-

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tion which is the essential feature of the divine charter—given to the Church when the Saviour said to the Apostles: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations." The work of the Church is to sanctify and save souls and that she cannot do unless they are brought under her immediate jurisdiction by submission to her spiritual sway.

In many dioceses throughout the country the Bishop, on his confirmation tour, keeps a record of the number of converts in the classes presented to him for confirmation. Wherever confirmation is given each year this will show the yearly accessions to the True Fold in the territory from which the class is drawn; and in other cases it indicates the number of converts made since the previous confirmation. But even this is valuable as an index of the Church's growth.

In this diocese the Most Reverend Archbishop and Bishop Trober, who assisted him in conferring the sacrament of confirmation last spring, kept a record of the converts in each class and it is consoling to know that the number in each parish is not inconsiderable. By this means it is possible to obtain a good idea of the average number of conversions each year. The record would be more complete and accurate if each pastor were to send to the diocesan chancery the number of non-Catholics brought into the fold during the year in his parish. This is the only way in which reliable information on this point can be obtained and it is safe to say that if this were done in all the dioceses throughout the United States the result would be gratifying to priests and people and would be a glorious tribute to the power and influence of the Church as a spiritual force. It would stir up Catholics to greater activity along these lines and would encourage them to qualify themselves to be "it ministers of the gospel" to those who are not of "the household of the faith." —St. Paul Bulletin.

INFALLIBILITY SCORED BY IGNORANCE

In nothing less than the New York Sun, we have this period which is an insinuation that infallibility means omniscience:

"We recognize the scope and comprehensiveness that may be ascribed to the doctrine of infallibility, but the unaided imagination cannot compass how it is that the most conspicuous of our unpunished felons are welcomed now and then to special audience by the Holy Father."

We beg to differ with the Sun's seer. If he knew the scope he would not have any opportunity to have his imagination play on the domain of infallibility.

"Unpunished felons" are not supposed to go to the Vatican to be tried for their crimes. The Holy Father knows nothing about the characters of thousands who kneel for his blessing. To the good he imparts his benediction to improve virtue still more, to the bad that they may become good. Infallibility has nothing to do with estimating passing characters. In admission to the Pope's presence, infallibility plays no part; this is a mere question of ordinary prudence, and certainly here the papacy has the advantage of more than a thousand years as precedents for guidance. The Holy Father does not give audience to men in order to set his seal of approval on their course, of which he oftentimes knows nothing.

He is infallible only in declaring doctrine and practice that lead men to Him of whom he is the Vicar. In the estimate of character, he neither poses as an authority nor desires to be one.

Of course, a man known to be flagrantly impious or notoriously criminal will be denied admission to the Pope's sacred presence, but in the great number received in audience there are doubtless many "unpunished felons," whose cases belong to the civil courts and not to Rome's tribunal, and whose visit to the Eternal City gives them no particular prestige.

The Sun reminds us of the hypocrites of old who charged the all-holy Christ with "receiving sinners and eating with them."

The Vatican, O Sun! is not the valley of Jehosaphat. —Catholic Columbian.

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