

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MERCY

"Bearing with one another, forgiving one another." (Col. iii. 13.)

We may well doubt if mercy dwells in our hearts unless we find it breaking forth into good deeds—"bearing with one another, forgiving one another." Patience, forgiveness, kindness, practical charity, all spring from the spirit of mercy.

In this life we have much to put up with. It is in the designs of God that we should have. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal. vi. 2.) The defects, the shortcomings of others irritate and annoy us out of all proportion to their cause, on account of our own self-love. And they are so constantly recurring that they create a sore by continued friction that seems impossible from so trifling a cause. These objectionable worries we have to put up with kindly and charitably, as we would have God to suffer us. If, without an effort or a prayer to control ourselves, we give way and become harsh, angry, suspicious, censorious, ready to pick a quarrel on the slightest provocation, are we children of God and followers of Christ? Where is the supernatural in our lives? Where is that which is meriting eternal life? What a contrast are we to the long suffering and patient Redeemer! If God were as harsh and as easily provoked by us, where should we be? Whereas, on the other hand, if, in spite of many and constant failures, we endeavour to be patient and bear each other's burdens, we are fulfilling the law of Christ.

Not only have we to overcome our dislikes, but daily have we to forgive. How can we say the "Our Father" unless we do? "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." Every offence against us is not intended, for we are so quick to imagine slights and take offence; but still daily, we may say there are complaints, offences, injuries, slights, one against the other. And let us remember that we are as objectionable, and perhaps much more objectionable, to others than they are to ourselves. And as our Blessed Saviour indulgently and times without number forgives us, so we must forgive our neighbour. St. Paul bids us have "mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience; bearing with one another, forgiving one another. Even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so you also." (Col. iii. 12, 13.) Continually, however, we hear from Catholics, and from people who think themselves good Catholics, "Oh, we cannot! It is every day and every hour, and no one has such annoyances as we have!" Where is the spirit of mercy in such a heart?

Practice makes perfect, and therefore Almighty God allows these daily and hourly troubles to annoy us that by daily and hourly passing over slights and affronts, and returning a kindly word for an ill-natured one, we exercise our mercy, humility, and patience, and so make it a virtue, a pious habit, pleasing unto God and worthy of God's reward.

A splendid way of acquiring such a habit is remembering and visiting the poor and the sick and helping others. In the first place, we shall find those who have something to murmur at, as the world would say, for more contented and grateful to God than we are. Their great trials and sufferings will make us ashamed to notice our own petty troubles, and their thankfulness for little favours and blessings God for His goodness will make us blush for our querulousness and murmurings.

In fulfilling this obligation, which we cannot ignore, of helping our neighbour we fulfil the law of charity, we bring to our own souls a sweetness and a peace that savour of God. And how easily a little help is given! A kind word, a short visit, even a look of sympathy and the friendly pressure of a hand clasp, a prayer with those in sorrow or distress—angels note it all, and that little act of mercy will return and find us and bless us when most we need it. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt. v. 7.) A merciful man doth good to his own soul." (Prov. xi. 17.)

Our mercy to others most efficaciously pleads to God for mercy for ourselves. It is a compact between poor sinners and the good God. Transpose the words. "Even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so you also," and make the Epistle say quite truly, "Even as you have forgiven others, so God also will forgive you."

There is an example that happened in the days of fervour, when men were brave and staunch and glad to die for the name of Christ. There was a certain priest, a strict and earnest man, but who had forgotten the lesson that we are trying to learn today. He was not merciful and forgiving. He was brought before the judge, and when accused, spoke boldly of his Master, Jesus Christ. He was condemned to death, and went forth unflinchingly to his martyrdom. But in his heart there was this one and fault: he had taken offence at a certain man, and would not forgive him. This poor man, hearing that the priest was to be put to death, ran in tears to meet him, and falling at his feet, besought his forgiveness as he died for Christ. Can you believe it? The priest refused, and with unkind upbraidings passed on; and his poor friend followed sorrowfully, beseeching for one kind word. They arrived where

the martyr's crown was waiting—the place of execution—but that wretched priest saw not the crown, but the instruments of torture. His soul turned craven, he abjured his faith, denied Jesus Christ, and saved his miserable life. Horror-stricken, his friend came boldly forth, professed himself a Christian, and died in his stead. Thus he gained God's forgiveness and the martyr's crown, which the priest had lost. That grace was wanting to him because he had no mercy and could not forgive.

Especially is mercy a Christ-like virtue. The law of Christ is a law of love and pity; and the life of Christ and the life of Christ, how nobly did they fulfil His law! Let us imitate our Saviour, and make sure of heaven. Remember what St. Ambrose says: "I do not believe anyone has perished who lovingly in life practised the works of mercy; for he has many, so many, good deeds interceding for him, and it is impossible for the prayers of so many not to be heard."

GENERAL INTENTION FOR FEBRUARY

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.

THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF OUR SOLDIERS

The mission of the Catholic Church in the world is not merely to teach her children how to live well, but also to aid them to die well. With the experience of centuries behind her, the Church knows how far the steady influence of religion can go in helping men to bear up under the great trials of life, and how strong and resolute it can make them when the last sacrifice is called for. War is one of those withering ordeals which test the souls of men; it plays with life and death as wind plays with the dust. We pray daily to be delivered from the scourge of war, but when the Supreme Arbiter, in the accomplishment of His own designs, permits this scourge to afflict mankind, the Church which He established on earth is ready to step in and play her role. No one knows better than she what men need when they are flung into the fiery furnace of war.

In the cataclysm which has been shaking Europe to its foundations during the past four years the Church was not found wanting in the fulfilment of her mission. Millions of her children were under arms in both the Central and Allied nations, and the moment war was declared and those millions began to fly at one another's throats, her Supreme Pontiff and his auxiliaries in the belligerent countries set to work to provide them with the spiritual help which she alone can furnish. Hundreds of priests answered the call of duty and held themselves in readiness to follow the flags of their respective countries.

Here in Canada—to mention only the land that concerns us—while it was a thrilling experience for our fellow citizens, inured to peace for a hundred years, to be snatched from civil life and told to prepare for war, it was also a new and thrilling experience for Canadian priests to exchange the cassock for khaki. When our troops began to cross the Atlantic, our chaplains accompanied the men, with instructions to share their dangers and, if need be, risk their lives to give them the benefits of their ministry. Needless to say, those soldiers of Christ carried out their orders to the letter, and in the trenches and dugouts fearlessly upheld the traditions of the Catholic priesthood; no danger was too imminent, no fatigue too galling, to keep them from doing their duty. In the exercise of their sacred functions several of them made the offering of their lives, others were wounded, all suffered privations in the spirit of self-sacrifice and abnegation. When the history of the present war shall be written, eloquent pages must needs record the heroism of our own Catholic chaplains who were found in the forefront of every battle, risking their lives in order to give a last absolution to wounded men about to appear before their Maker. "Their intrepid courage in face of peril," says a recent writer, "has been a source of incalculable strength to our armies, and on many momentous occasions has turned defeat into victory."

But it was not merely in the frenzy of battle and amid the deafening din and clatter of German shells that the influence of our chaplains was felt and appreciated. Those zealous men also worked in base hospitals, spending weary days and wearisome nights reconciling souls to God or instructing them in the truths of religion. When soldiers are nursing their wounds behind the battle-line they have time to reflect on many things, not the least important for them being the relative value of religious systems. As a result of their face to face experience with eternity they began to look at Catholicism from new angles. Letters and newspapers have told the world that thousands of soldiers have entered the Catholic Church in the war zone. Other thousands, shaken in their faith in their own sects, may not yet have surrendered, but their contact with our priesthood on the battlefield has undoubtedly modified their views about Catholic beliefs and practices. Who can say what the future has in store for our returned soldiers? Has their four years' sojourn in the Catholic atmos-

phere of France and Belgium changed their spiritual outlook? Time alone will tell.

Meanwhile we should not refuse our tribute of admiration to the brave chaplains whose zeal urged them to work for the salvation of souls under war conditions heretofore unprecedented. How long will it be before we shall be able to welcome them home to work in more peaceful zones? At no distant date, we trust. The collapse of the German war machine and the cessation of hostilities will give them opportunities to continue here what they had begun in Europe.

The period of reconstruction in Canada would seem to have arrived. The publications issued by the Government tell us what has been planned and what has already been accomplished in the matter of military hospitals for infirm men and of special schools for their re-education. A great deal is being done, even now, for the temporal welfare of returned soldiers and for those who will return later. Vocational training in its various forms is being imparted in order that some provision shall be made for the livelihood and comfort of hundreds of thousands of war veterans. This is the right kind of work, and no effort should be spared to get those men back smoothly into the grooves of civil life after the jolts of the past four years.

And yet this is only one side of a very thorny after-war problem. The temporal welfare of Canadian soldiers is undoubtedly important, but is not more important than their spiritual welfare. If men were mere brute beasts who have a right simply to what is required for the upkeep of their bodies, one might possibly be satisfied with what will be done to meet their needs on reconstruction lines; but men have souls as well, and this spiritual element must needs be cultivated not less than the material. Four years of life amid the desolation of war will have necessarily emancipated many returned warriors from the trammels and exigencies of ordinary civilization. Their familiarity with scenes of bloodshed, the little values they learned to put on human life, their own share in deeds of carnage, have undoubtedly made them callous to the finer social instincts and to the more fundamental matters of the soul. Vocational training may enable them to gain a livelihood but it will not necessarily modify their mental attitude to the only thing that matters, the interests of their immortal souls. Evidently something deeper is required than mere vocational training, something that goes to the very essence of things. Our soldiers came in contact with that "something" on the battlefield. It is called "Catholicism"; it is the influence which they saw gripping the souls of their dying companions, raising them above the sordidness of life and convincing them of the value they should put on things eternal. A religion that can do this is a valuable national asset and should claim the sympathy of any reasonable Government.

Unhappily, this view of an important matter is not generally shared by Governments, which, when they are not positively hostile, are at least indifferent to the interests of human souls and give such things little more than a passive concern. Naturally we do not expect much practical sympathy or help from our governing bodies, but we should at least not experience downright opposition; nor the record of our chaplains at the front should secure us this immunity at least. And yet in one of our Western provinces our Catholic clergy, instead of being able to exercise the ministry without let or hindrance among their own people, returned soldiers as well as others, are obliged to spend a great part of their time gathering money to pay taxes on churches. Only in passing we mention this crying injustice, because we feel that in the not too distant future the unfettered influence of the Catholic Church in Canada will be needed to stem Socialistic and other anti-national torrents, and our Governments, both Federal and Provincial, should realize beforehand where their best interests lie.

Meanwhile there is a ray of hope. All the men that have returned, or will return, from the front may not be spiritual models, but the majority of them will surely know how to appreciate the value of religion and religious teaching. For this reason the spiritual welfare of our soldiers at home and abroad calls for our prayerful sympathy. Those who are still in Europe are undoubtedly seized with homesickness, a disease that must be met by patience and resignation and one that their chaplains will know how to deal with. Those who have returned home should be asked to forget the horrors of the past four years; or if they cannot forget them, at least they should try to recall them only as they would recall a dismal night mare, or an unbalanced dream, which they should hope would never come true again. In the midst of their newly found lives and their world's concerns, let them, if they will, fight their battles over again at their own firesides; but let them avoid everything that would tend to overthrow social order. If it pleases them, let them display their medals, tokens of their bravery in Flanders, but above all let them live as law-abiding citizens, ready to defend sound doctrine and sound principles as they were to defend their king and country.

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

The value of mind is measured by the nature of the objects it habitually contemplates.—Rt. Rev. J. L. Spalding.

It is a great deal easier to do that which God gives us to do, no matter how hard it is, than to face the responsibility of not doing it.

Oh, for some voice brave enough and strong enough to reach the multitude of ears now closed by vanity, frivolity and heedlessness, and preach to them the old Evangel, which tells how a woman's chief jewels are purity, tenderness, and truth; how she should be gentle and yet strong, gracious in her courtesy, considerate in her kindness, and firm in her constancy.—Christian Reed.

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