

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. P. HICKLEY, O. S. B. SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW "She at the same hour, coming in, confessed to the Lord." (Luke 11:32.)

The old year is drawing to a close and a new one is about to begin. In order to end the old year well and to begin the new one properly, St. Chrysostom gives us this advice: "Render thanks to Almighty God, who has until this day given you life; think over your past life and remember that these days have gone, the years have come to an end, yea the greater part of your life may have passed; and what good have you done?" Let us follow his advice. In the short time before the old year closes let us still make good use of it. Of the prophetess Anna, it is said in today's Gospel that she came to the temple in Jerusalem to praise the Lord, when Simon held Jesus in his arms. Let us at this hour, when we also have come to praise the Lord, humbly acknowledge all the graces and goodness which He has shown us during the past year, and let us make the resolution to lead a better life during the new year. This shall be a point for our consideration to-day.

Our dear Lord has in the past year truly shown us a great goodness; He has preserved our life and health, has fed and clothed us, often saved us from dangers, in other words He has daily opened His hand, and blessed us with many blessings. And who can count the graces He has granted to our soul? How often has He admonished and induced us to return to the path of virtue? He might have punished us because of our many sins, but He has had patience and forbearance with us and has given us time to repent. My dear Christian, how have we been worthy of all these graces? Alas, when we look back over our past life, we must acknowledge that punishment rather than reward should have been our lot.

What have we done this year for the Lord? Examine your conscience and you will probably have to acknowledge that you have done but little good, and, may be, a great deal of evil. Christian parents, have you erred in the education of your children? Have you taught, warned and punished them when it was necessary? Have you given them good example? And how have you acted during this year, Christian children? Have you honored and loved your parents? Have you been disobedient and offended them by bad conduct? Have you, Christian wife and husband, been just and patient with each other? Must you not all, my Christians, acknowledge that you have been ungrateful toward Almighty God, and have poorly repaid Him for His goodness? What profit have you earned for eternity in the past year?

Let us not allow the last days of the year to pass without thanking God for His many graces, for His patience and forbearance with us; let us make a firm purpose of amendment; let us resolve to sin no more. That which has happened can not be undone, but sins may be wiped out by works of penance, so that we may become rich in virtue and merit. The Lord calls to us: "Son observe the time" (Ecclesi. ix, 23). He means to say: "You have lost much time which you should have used to gather treasures for eternity, and you cannot recall this lost time, therefore make use of the time which is yet given you, repent your sins, confess them, perform good deeds, so that you may not only make up for what you have lost, but also make secure your salvation. If our remaining days may only be few, we will have the assurance that the Lord will not let us go unrewarded, when He calls the laborers unto Him to receive their pay. The householder gave those who came at the eleventh hour their full wages. Our Lord will act in this manner with us if during this short time, which our Lord will still grant us on earth, we will be faithful in working out our salvation.

Let this be our firm resolution to-day, my dear Christians: We will, according to the advice of the Apostle, not walk unwisely, but as wise, and spend the latter days of our life in serving God and working out our salvation. Amen.

FRUITS OF A MOTHER'S TEACHING

Two priests and a nun were the fruits of a mother's teaching in a little home almost under the shadow of Louvain. The elder brother, describing his early home, told of a book, two feet long and one and a half broad, printed in old Flemish, that his mother used to read to them. It was a collection of Lives of the Saints. "We listened with intense delight," said Father Pamphile. "We often insisted on her giving up her work and reading for us, especially the accounts of martyrdoms and of the ancient hermits, such as Paul and Anthony."

We can imagine the prayer in the mother's heart as she read to her little ones from the quaint old book. Little did she realize that of the group at her knee one would become a nun and that her Pamphile and Joseph would be priests. Joseph became known to the world as Father Damien, the Martyr of Molokai.

ST. WINEFRIDE'S WELL

When it was announced some weeks ago that the flow of water had been restored to the famous well of St. Winefride, situated in Wales at Holywell, the rejoicing among English Catholics was as general as had been the lamentation when, a little over a year ago, the well became dry as the result of the explosion of a charge of dynamite in a lead mine some distance away. As early as 1911 the flow of water had perceptibly diminished, but not until the explosion was it cut off completely. On that occasion the nearby village of Baghill was inundated, while the men at work in the mine barely escaped with their lives. With the approbation of Bishop Mostyn of Minevia, in whose diocese the historic place of pilgrimage is situated, the inhabitants of Holywell sued the company responsible for the accident, with the result that it has installed a new system which will insure an adequate and permanent supply of water for the well. Instead of being brought from the Halkyn Mountains, as formerly, the new supply will be conveyed in pipes from the Halway mines directly to the well, which has been concreted so that none of the water may escape into the earth.

St. Winefride's Well is the direct result of a miracle. At the beginning of the seventh century Wales was inhabited by a large number of saintly men who passed up and down evangelizing the land, or else lived in holy retirement in its dense forests. Amongst these God-fearing men was St. Beuno, who after bearing churches and founding monasteries in various places finally settled in North Wales during the reign of King Cadwan, grandfather of the celebrated Cadwallader. The good saint was well on towards middle age when one day as he journeyed through the land he decided to pay a visit to his sister, the wife of a powerful chieftain named Theuth, son of Eluth, who held his rank and his land by the graces of Cadwan the King.

Now, Theuth and his wife had an only child who was the light and joy of their hearts. She was called Dewi, or Dewi, changed afterwards to Gwenfrewi, the Welsh of Winefride. The chieftain's daughter was distinguished for beauty, virtue and intelligence, and about the time that St. Beuno arrived at the castle her father was casting about for some one to whom he could entrust her education. The good monk begged from Theuth a strip of land upon which to build a church wherein he might celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and preach the Word of God. In gratitude for the cession of a sufficiently large plot of ground, St. Beuno not only volunteered to act as parish priest to the retainers of the chieftain, but also to fill the post of tutor to his only child. Under his influence the maiden progressed rapidly in learning, but not one whit less rapid was her progress in virtue. She quickly recognized the beauty of a life of virginity, and, encouraged by her saintly preceptor, made a vow that she would have no other possession either in this world or the next than Christ and Him crucified. Knowing that her parents were even then looking about for some suitable one to whom to espouse her, the maid begged St. Beuno to inform them of the vow which she had taken and to gain their consent to its fulfilment. Hard as it must have been for them to see their only child put an end to their hopes for the perpetuation of the family line, the noble pair with true Christian resignation agreed at once to their daughter's wish, and it was then and there decided that Winefride should receive the nun's veil as soon as she was fully prepared.

It was not long after, that one day when she was alone in the castle, her parents and the remainder of the household having preceded her to church, Winefride was assailed by a certain lord named Caradoc, supposed to have been the son of an Armorican king who was at that time visiting King Cadwan. Knocking at the door of the castle to beg a drink of water, and finding this young maiden of gazing beauty alone, he began at once to make violent love to her. Though the frightened girl begged him to desist and assured him she was not free, he only pressed his suit the more ardently. Finally, in order to escape from his importunities, Winefride remarked to him that, since he was a king's son, it behooved her to put on her best apparel in his honor. So saying, she left the room and fled into another, through which she escaped from the castle and ran down the steep hill toward the church. But Caradoc, speedily discovering her stratagem, pursued her furiously and overtook her just as she was about to enter it with menacing threats he renewed his offers, but the only reply of the maid was that she would rather die than become his wife. Whereupon, enraged beyond measure by her refusal, he drew his sword and with a single stroke cut off her head. They were standing on a steep slope, and while the maiden's body lay where it had fallen, her head rolled down to the very door of the sacred edifice in full sight of her agonized parents and the horror-stricken people, and immediately on the spot where it had first rested a spring of the purest water gushed forth.

The life of St. Winefride, however, was not destined to end with this tragic incident, for St. Beuno, inspired by God, at once left the altar, and proceeding to the spot where the head of the martyr lay, took it

up and placed it beside the body, covering both with his cloak. He then re-entered the church and went on with the Mass. When it was finished, he returned to the body of the saint, and after offering up a fervent prayer to Almighty God, removed its covering. Immediately Winefride, as if waking from a deep sleep, rose to her feet in perfect health, the only sign of the severance of her head being a thin white line encircling her neck. Tradition states that St. Beuno, seeing the murderer standing near his victim quite unrepentant of his heinous crime, called upon the Almighty to punish him, and that instantly the ground opened and swallowed him up.

As may be imagined, Winefride, after her miraculous restoration to life, was even more completely united to God than before. Without delay she proceeded to erect a convent on her father's land in which she trained a large community of holy nuns. Later on she founded another in a far-off corner of Wales. During her life she performed many miracles and was everywhere venerated as a saint. At the age of fifty years, full of holiness and good works, she passed to her eternal reward. Although her body was removed to Shrewsbury, her shrine at Holywell continued to attract pious pilgrims through all the succeeding centuries. It is related that St. Beuno himself before his death, while seated upon the stone that now stands in the outer well pool, prophesied that whoever on that spot should ask for a benefit from God in the name of St. Winefride would obtain the grace he asked for, if it were for the good of his soul.

We can easily understand why, in the Ages of Faith, this holy well should have possessed as powerful an attraction for pious pilgrims as does the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes for the faithful of our day. In the earliest English literature mention is made of the wonderful miracles which took place at this shrine. But the most remarkable thing about the history of St. Winefride's Well is that in so high a country as Wales there should have been no attempt made, even in Reformation days, to interfere with the pilgrimages that wended their way thither. It was only in the eighteenth century that public processions were discontinued, and even after that time scores upon scores of private pilgrimages were made to the shrine.

Popular belief in the curative powers of this water has not undergone the least change since the apostasy of Great Britain from the true Faith. While the story of the Saint's life grew by degrees confused and vague, the tradition with regard to the well has remained clear and definite from the day when the healing waters first flowed from it. It is probably because of the unquestioning acceptance of this tradition by the people that the Reformers, with all their zeal for the destruction of everything associated with the Catholic Church, did not have the hardihood to attempt to shake their belief in it. It is also on record that many Protestants, coming in good faith to this shrine, have been rewarded by miraculous cures.

Within recent years the public pilgrimages have been revived, and during the summer months it has been no unusual sight on Sundays to see heavily laden trains from the surrounding territory—even from places as far distant as London—laboriously pushing their way up the slopes of the hill to the holy shrine. The Franciscan Fathers, who have a large establishment in the nearby village of Pentasaph, have charge of the shrine and are always ready to be of spiritual service to the devout pilgrim. The marvelous cures that have been wrought, through the intercession of St. Winefride, have continued down to our own day. Authentic records have been preserved at the shrine of the more recent ones. Father Thomas Swift, S. J., in his sequel to his "Life of St. Winefride," has gone carefully into the question of these cures, and finds many of them so perfectly well authenticated that they cannot be considered other than miraculous. It is very consoling to know that even in our day miracles continue to occur, if not with the same frequency, at least with the same marks of evident authenticity as in the Catholic Middle Ages.

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that covers and encloses the fountain proper, and over it what was called the "Chapel of St. Winefride," now used by the Anglican parishioners of the place for social purposes. The entire group is built in fifteenth century Gothic and is as splendid an example of this style of architecture as can be found anywhere in Wales.

To-day Holywell is a smoky, grimy city, very unlike the quaint and peaceful town of long ago, when pious farmers turned their feet toward it to be shriven from their sins, or when the halt and the lame came in constant procession to the well of the holy maiden to be cured of their infirmities.

The station at Holywell is situated close to the estuary of the River Dee, into which the overflow of water from the well finds its way. Leaving the station the road, bordered by precipitous banks on one side, begins to ascend gradually, and one need not walk very far before awaking to the fact that the climb is down right difficult. At the lodge-gate a ticket of admission must be obtained, which is gladly given by the housekeeper of the little shop. Turning to the right, one descends a flight of stone steps to a level below the ground, and after passing under an arch at the bottom and through a small iron gate one finally reaches the very spot where the Saint was slain. It is a kind of crypt, very dark on the right side, but brightened on the left by rays of light coming through from an opening on the outside. The walls of this crypt are black with age and the stone flags of the floor are worn away by the feet of countless pilgrims. In the centre of the crypt, with the flagstones forming a passage all around it and the pillars rising over it to form a protecting roof, is a low, octagonal well inclosing a good sized space. If one goes up between two of the pillars, one can look down into the green depths of St. Winefride's water below him. To the right, beneath one of the pillars of this octagonal shelter, can be seen the actual spring that gushed forth as the head of the Saint was severed from her body. Chained here and there around the well are cans for dipping the water up, and it is no unusual sight to see the pious pilgrim, after having devoutly crossed himself, immerse one of these cans and drink of its contents. Since the seventeenth century the flow of water from the well has been most remarkable, averaging up to the year 1911 thousands of gallons hourly.

To the left, just outside the octagonal inclosure, there is another body of green water in a large pool, with steps descending into it at one side. This is fed from the spring through the outer wall. It is evidently a place for bathing—a piscina like the famous one at Lourdes, which is familiar to all. The octagonal pool is reserved for drinking purposes. Like this latter, the bathing pool is bordered by a strip of worn pavement, beyond which are three arches through which the daylight streams. Another large pool for bathing purposes stretches out from here, with small wooden sheds on either side for the use of the bathers, beyond which is a high wall which shuts off completely the outer world. At the corner of the arch, in the pool is "St. Beuno's stone," railed in all around by an iron fence. It is not unusual to see invalids of every type bathing in the cold waters of this pool. In order that these afflicted persons may receive the proper care, the Franciscan Fathers have erected a fine hospice in the vicinity of the shrine.

It is a matter for sincere congratulation that this medieval place of pilgrimage has been restored, for shrines like these are necessary in our modern life to lift us out of the atmosphere of worldliness and materialism in which we live. Nothing brings back more vividly to our minds the Catholic days of old than a visit to a shrine like this, where the spirit of St. Winefride still seems to linger. Today, as in the long ago, she still proves herself a powerful intercessor before God's throne, obtaining for her devout clients health of body and soul.—John Dunne in Rosary Magazine.

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NEW YEAR THOUGHTS

How fleet the years! They pass and are gone forever. They are gone like strains of distant music, that swell for a moment upon the breeze only to die away into silence, leaving to our senses but the impression of joy or sadness. In this busy life, time steals on almost without our knowing it; we are too intent with our occupations to note the rapidity of its flight. Silently and constantly, day follows day, month follows month, until our eyes are opened and we behold with astonishment one more year has slipped by to join the procession of the many years that have already winged their way into the past. Another year is sped and its remembrance will gradually diminish into vague memories of vanished hopes and fears. Another year is sped and soon will be forgotten; yet, forgotten though it be, each separate act lives on to influence our life's remaining years. Each thought, each word, each work, has served to ennoble, purify, refine, and elevate our character, or to drag it down to lower levels.

How fleet the years and soon to be forgotten! The one just done, however, still stands out prominently before our eyes, gradually dimming into the threshold of the New Year, what is more natural than that we should carefully survey the Old? What is more natural than that we should look back? We do look back and we behold, it may be, an uninterrupted chain of blessings and benefits from the Divine Hand; perhaps, it is a long series of trials and difficulties, that meets our view. But whether the past year has occasioned us joy or sorrow, whether blessings or trials have been our lot, we find an indescribable pleasure in regarding its events. There is always a more sincere gratification in recollecting the realities of the past than in dwelling upon the uncertainties of the time to come.

The flowers of the future, though fragrant and fair, with the past withered leaves may never compare. For dear is each leaf—and dearer each thorn— In the wreaths which the brows of our past years have worn.

We enter upon the New Year like a traveler entering an unexplored region. We turn our wistful, wondering gaze toward the future. What has it in store for us? We long to pierce the mist that hides it from our view. Well, we know that it lies beyond our power to forecast the events of the coming year. Much must be left to that Providence that governs all. Nevertheless, even amid the uncertainties of the future, to which we are subjected, we can, to a great extent, mould and shape our destinies. The old year has fled and no power can bring it back again. It has gone with all its wasted opportunities and neglected graces, with its hopes and its fears, its chattered joys and sorrows, and which of us can restrain a sigh of regret for much that has passed with it?

True it is that what is done cannot be undone, but we can make use of the past. We can, by reflection on the past and resolution in the present mark out the direction in which the current of our lives shall run. As we glance over the Old Year, we see it strewn with the graves of dead opportunities and wasted graces. Perhaps, to our minds, it has been a failure. We worked and strived; but failure, gloomy failure, has ever marched like a spectre in our path. We grieve to think it. Ah, better, instead of grieving for the past, turn our faces toward our present tasks, and with renewed hope and vigor set out bravely upon our way. The past is useful to us only as a warning of the dangers that beset us, the future we leave to God, the present is our own. Yes, to us it belongs with all its golden opportunities. It is ours to use or to neglect. We have erred in the past. Well for us if we have learned the consoling lesson:

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Why do bells for Christmas ring? Why do little children sing? Once a lovely shining star, Seen by wise men from afar Gently moved until its light Made a manger cradle bright: There a lying Baby lay, Pillowed soft upon the hay, And its mother sang and smiled, "This is Christ, the Holy Child." Therefore bells for Christmas ring; Therefore little children sing. —EUGENE FIELD

CHRISTMAS FLOWERS

The Earth is so bleak and deserted, So cold the winds blow, That no bud or no blossom will venture To peep from below: But, longing for spring time, they tinkle, nestle, Deep under the snow.

O, in May how we honored Our Lady, Her own month of flowers! How happy we were with our garlands Through all the spring hours! All her shrines, in the church or the wayside, Were made into bowers.

And in August—her glorious Assumption: What feast was so bright! What clusters of virginal lilies, So pure and so white! Why, the incense could scarce overpower Their perfume that night.

And through her dear feasts of October The roses bloomed still; Our baskets were laden with flowers, Her vases to fill: Oleanders, geraniums, and myrtles, We chose at our will.

And we know when the Purification, Her first feast, comes round, The early spring flowers, to greet it, Just opening are found; And pure, white, and spotless, the snowdrop Will pierce the dark ground.

And now in this dreary December, Our glad hearts are faint To see if Earth comes not to help us; We seek all in vain: Not the tiniest blossom is coming Till Spring breathes again.

And the bright feast of Christmas is dawning, And Mary is blest: For now she will give us her Jesus, Our dearest, our best, And see where she stands, the Maid Mother, Her Babe on her breast!

And not one poor garland to give her, And yet now, behold, How the Kings bring their gifts—myrrh, and incense And bars of pure gold: And the shepherds have brought for the Baby Some lambs from their folds.

He stretches His tiny hands towards us, He brings us all grace; And look at His Mother who holds Him,— The smile on her face Says they welcome the humblest gifts In the manger we place.

Where love takes, let love give; and so dearly seek; Love counts but the will, And the heart has its flowers of devotion No winter can chill; They who cared for "good-will" the first Christmas Will care for it still.

In the Chapel on Jesus and Mary, From our hearts let us call, At each Ave Maria we whisper A rosary shall fall, And at each Gloria Patri a lily, The crown of them all! —ABELLADE A. PROCTOR

You who are strong lend a helping hand to those who are weak; show yourselves grateful to God, who has granted you the pleasure of making others happy and exercising mercy rather than obliged you to seek to inspire it by your charity. Become the god of the poor, resembling God by the imitation of His mercy.—St. Gregory of Nazianzen.

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