

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

THE REV. F. P. HICKEY, O. S. B.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SONS OF GOD

"Whoever is led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. viii. 14)

What joy and enthusiasm should be kindled in our souls by the announcement of this truth, that St. Paul declares to us, that we are destined to be "the sons of God; and if sons, heirs also; co-heirs with Christ." But, alas! this announcement awakens no echo in the souls of so many. They are in this world; they raise their eyes to nothing beyond, but find occupation, pleasure, contentment in the fleeting joys of the present. What a misfortune to disregard the glorious destiny to which they are called, and to content themselves with the world "which passeth away." They give heed to the warnings of the Scripture: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world" (1 John ii. 15); and that other, "The friendship of this world is the enemy of God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world becometh an enemy of God" (Jas. ii. 4).

An enemy of God! and they are called to be the sons of God! It is all-important, then, that we watch ourselves, and do not make the fatal mistake of becoming an enemy, whereas we are called to be sons. And it is easy and natural to make this mistake, deluded and misguided by self-love and self-sufficiency. Witness those of whom our Blessed Lord speaks, as claiming heaven because they have prayed and done miracles in His name; but they had been ruled by self, and not led by the Spirit of God. Therefore the gospel continues, "And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work in vain" (Matt. viii. 23).

How can we explain this? Alas! in all that they had done, it had not been the Will of God they had sought to do, but their own will. They had not been "led by the Spirit of God." This is the test by which we make sure of our calling. "Whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." It is the word "led" that is the stumbling-block! A man has faculties and intelligence; he determines to go by them, imagining that they are all-sufficient. He forgets their limits; of how much he is ignorant; how prone he is to evil; the insidious enemies around him. He chooses his own way.

A fatal mistake, indeed, to imagine we can choose our own way and be independent. Our own way, blind men choosing their own way, and refusing assistance and guidance. Our own way! forgetting that we have deceitful enemies around us, leading us to destruction—enemies, who craftily conceal the dangers and the evils under the guise of pleasure and freedom and independence. Our own way! and yet we cannot shake ourselves free from the thralldom, for we are slaves to our sins. Such a man forfeits the grace and help of the Spirit, and is powerless of himself. For instance, some Sunday he may hear some word of our Lord in the gospel that is a rebuke to him; he knows that he should change and repent, but no, he clings to his own opinion or to the habit he has formed. He thinks he is free and independent, yet in reality he is a slave, enthralled in his evil ways. Warnings are given; even a bad conscience can be stricken by fear of some evil that seems impending. He is powerless to change, though he dreads the consequences. Aided by the tempter, he stifles the voice of conscience, and remains a miserable slave of sin. Thus, from the practices of a good Christian life, he is led astray and, sooner or later, the tempter leads him from the Faith. Good practices he has abandoned; next some doctrine or precept of the Church annoys him, persistently rebukes him. Will he be humble enough to obey, or rebel and choose his own way and cling to his own will? Alas! he thus falls from the Faith! For what is a heretic, but a chooser, as the meaning of the word implies; and one that clings obstinately to his own opinion in defiance of the Church? He becomes one of those of whom the prophet speaks: "They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear; but walked in their own will, and in the perversity of their wicked heart" (Jer. vii. 24).

But how different all is, thank God, for those who lovingly yield themselves to be "led by the Spirit of God." They are "partakers of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit dwells within them, as St. Paul tells us, and securely in His strength and under His guidance they tread the path of life. Their faith, received at Baptism, strengthened within them at Confirmation, beams down upon their path of life, enlightening them day by day to fulfill their duties to God and man. Walking in the light of this divine Faith, there is no hesitancy, no doubt, no difficulties in following the road that leads to eternal life. Faith points out the way; hope sustains them in the journey, both the gift of that divine Spirit by Whom they are led. The hope that they are thus the sons of God inspires them with courage to bear their cross, to dare and do whatever the Spirit bids them. This hope bids

them also remember that, if they are the sons of God, they are "heirs also, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Let us pray, then, for the Holy Spirit to endow us with wisdom and understanding to give ourselves to be led by Him, and not by the false maxims of the world, of self, of the evil one. Pray that He may teach us to set a right value on the means to salvation; to relish the things of God; to be ever ready to follow His leading and His guidance, for then we shall be "the sons of God."

CATHOLIC LIFE IN THE RHINELAND

By Katherine Tynan

I said the other day to an English Catholic lady: "No Catholic could fail to be happy in the Rhineland," and she too had felt the same sense of a spiritual influence. Not in Italy, not in Ireland, have I felt quite the same. In English Catholic churches I have sometimes felt the same warm thrill, but there because one was in a stronghold of the religion with the world beyond the walls. When I say the world I do not mean the differing religions, but mean by the world that Pagan beast of hoofs and horns treading down the spirit.

There is in the Rhineland churches none of the happenings which perturb the islander, which he or she, if disposed to make the best of it, tries to explain by differences of race and character. You will not find here the irreverent sight-seeing crowds of which none of the holy places is sacred. In Cologne Cathedral, where there is an incessant stream of sightseers, they are not allowed to perambulate during any service, and this reverent ordinance awakens reverence in those who just come to see.

Pilgrims to Cologne Cathedral from all parts of the world come hat in hand: there is no talking; no loud, irreverent laughter. I don't believe there is even any need for the scarlet-coated beadles to ask an irreverent person to withdraw. The sight-seers are to all appearance as reverent as the worshippers.

I used to think it a most delightful sight in the summer to see the bands of school children, knapsacks on back, staff in hand, come from afar with their teachers to visit the Rhineland, or old people or young men and maidens, all pilgrims, sit down in the great Cathedral and eat the food they carried. They were most truly at home in their Father's House, in this great and splendid mansion which man has made for God. Once I saw an old man eating seated at the foot of the altar rails. The beadles apparently saw no reason to interfere, which was quite as it should be. Where could a pilgrim be more at home than by the shrine of the Three Kings?

At the Masses in the Dorn—the Cathedral—which begin at 4 in the morning in summer time, so that the young people flocking countrywards may go with that blessing upon them, at 6 in winter and go on up to 11.15. There is an enormous congregation, mainly standing, because the seats are but as islands in the great space. Such a reverent congregation! When we came first our friends of the Occupation used to say to us: "You must go to the Dorn on Sunday at 11.15. There is a great preacher, and the fervor of the congregation is wonderful. It is something to see."

It is quite the thing for the high officers of the Occupation to take their guests to the Dorn on Sunday to hear the music and the great preacher. If you encounter the choir coming or going from or to the Dorn in a narrow street you will be held up for a perceptible length of time if you are unwilling to break the procession. But I imagine the great attraction is the fervour of the congregation.

Our friends of the Occupation were unaware that the same fervour is to be seen at every Mass, every Benediction, in the seventy-three churches of Cologne.

Personally I find the spiritual atmosphere of other churches than the Dorn more compelling. The Dorn took hundreds of years in the building. We were well in the Victorian Age, when the interior was quite finished, and it keeps a bright modern look within, while the ages and the weather have made the magnificent exterior black but comely. The smaller, very old churches saturated with prayers, are more wonderful to my mind. I would choose rather the Ursula Kirche, St. Maria in Kapitol, St. Andrew's in Kloster, the Hostel Kirche, half-a-dozen others. St. Ursula's I know best of all, and it knows me best.

The congregation begin to look at me with a friendly eye. The collectors for the poor have tracked me to my private address. When I asked my Frau the other day if she would protect us in case of revolution, she said, with an arm about my shoulder: "No one would hurt you. The people would say, 'You are not to hurt that lady, she goes up and down our streets to the Ursula Kirche, with her daughter.' That was a fellowship of the faith I loved to be caught into."

There is a sobriety about the German Churches which appeals to the islander. There is nothing garish, none of the things which jar our insular susceptibilities in the French and Italian Churches. There is a warm glow of gold in the dimness, and there are the jewelled

windows: there may be a very ancient tomb or monument; beyond these, nothing of decoration. They are perpetually washing and cleaning—the badge of the Rhineland might be the plant or genista—so that one avoids the particular stuffiness of Italian Churches. The walls are bare if they have not moral paintings, and the old seats, curiously, have been polished by the generations.

In my mind the children and the Churches of Cologne are closely associated. The Masses at 8 and 9 are the children's Masses. One goes down these dark winter mornings, through the narrow streets teeming with children, to St. Ursula's. A good many children will be on their way to Mass. I have never seen such independent mites of children. They go in groups or couples, or alone.

I know one little boy who goes to St. Ursula's who cannot be more than ten. He has the sleepy, wondering look of something just introduced to the world, and not quite comfortable about it. His yellow head is like a new-born duckling's, and he wears a fur collar to his minute coat, an almost universal possession in the Fatherland, where all the world goes comfortably clad, though the mark tumbles. I cannot get over the amazing spectacle of that infant going sturdily into the old church and knowing his way about in it.

On Friday morning there is a fruit and vegetable open-air market in the Ursula Platz. The Germans have a complete indifference to weather. Perhaps Cologne rain, like Mayo rain, does not give cold. In the narrow street by the side of the Church there will be two or three patient horses standing. You will always find a woman there with an apron full of carrots, or some such delicacy, or a child feeding the horses. This affection for animals is one of the things which persuade one that the English and Germans are akin, though they blundered into war.

Once I saw a tiny child in a blue shirt and blue knicker held up on the shoulders by straps feeding a very tall big horse with single blades of hay. He had to stand tiptoe to do it, and the horse had to crane his neck to receive the dainty, which he did with the patient politeness of the animal. The child, curly golden-haired, and no more than three, might have sat for the Infant St. John. He gurgled and crowed when the horse took his blade of hay.

It is worth while to be early at St. Ursula's eight o'clock Mass to hear the school-boys come in. They come in great numbers; and this is only one church of the 78. Well might a young French officer of unusual intelligence say enviously: "Ah, but those people there; they have less babies!"

The school-boys come like a rushing and beautiful wind. They are all perfectly drilled, a race of soldiers. There is no dragging of the feet, no clatter of hobnails as one would hear it at home. In perfect order, and with that swift push which is the perfection of human movement, they take their places as they will vacate them at the end of Mass. The Germans have the sense of the queue. It is part of their strange orderliness.

That swift rush of the boys is a recurring joy; but when they sing it is wings to carry the duldest soul on high. Like wings that great pure volume of sound beats against the high, grained ceiling, and fills every nook and cranny of the Church.

Not only the boys. Everyone sings, and there is not a discord. I am persuaded that we islanders are much wronged. Why must we be as dumb dogs, opening not the mouth, when these people are praising God as His angels may? Are not our voices atrophied from disuse, discouragement?

It is in keeping that the long procession of the boys leaving the church, or wherever you meet it is so civilized, so friendly, so ready to smile. I have not yet found the Hooligan among those singing children.

TWO CENTENARIES

Two centenaries of widely different character have been recently celebrated in France. They were the anniversaries of the births of two men who affected profoundly the lives of their fellow men not only in their native country France but throughout the world. Their names are Louis Pasteur and Ernest Renan. But the unanimity of sentiment that acclaimed Pasteur as the world's greatest modern benefactor was significantly absent in the celebration in honor of Renan.

The Catholics of France as well as their coreligionists throughout the world could not participate in the movement to make a hero of one whose influence they cannot but deem baneful. Born in the faith, and educated by the Church, Renan became a sceptic and a scoffer, and turned his great talents and wonderful literary skill against the Church which gave him every advantage he possessed. Sacrificing tradition to what he considered scientific reason, he exchanged the Catholic creed for a Pantheism as vague as it was fascinating. At the time when Newman through his study of the fathers was finding his way into the ancient Church, Renan in contact with the rationalistic literature and philosophy which Kant, and Hegel were popularizing, lost supernatural

faith and retained nothing of religion but some scattered moral fragments without supernatural source or divine sanction. In the fall of 1845, three days before Newman submitted to the Church at Littlemore, Renan left the seminary in Paris to enter the Sorbonne.

Whatever may be written of Renan and his work by those who can not appreciate the great influence for good that went out of his life, when, as he departed, it is clear from the contrast presented by the spontaneous outburst of affection and reverence that greeted the centenary of his fellow countryman the loyal Catholic Pasteur, that failure must be written across Renan's career. His was a wasted life. This was shown in nothing so clearly as in his last days. Then according to Canon Barry, his biographer, he became, "a sceptic, idealist, amused spectator of all that went on around him, holding all things to be vanity, yet enjoying them as if they had savor and substance."

The present age is inclining more and more away from scepticism and back to positive beliefs. Renan once wrote "error founds nothing; no error can last very long." In the light of the years that have passed since Renan's death, these words seem to have been prophetic. Surely these two centenaries of Pasteur and Renan, judged by their fruits, confirm the wise observation of a recent philosopher, "scepticism is a barren shrew, homeless and unbeloved, while religion dwells in her own house, the joyful mother of children."—The Pilot.

IS MARRIAGE A FAILURE?

This question, when voiced by the modern critics of marriage, implies that there is something essentially wrong with the structure of marriage as it exists in our days. It intimates that a permanent union is an ideal that cannot be realized by mankind in its present condition. Even such inadequate indissolubility of the marriage tie as is still upheld by society is regarded as a burden too heavy and a yoke too galling. Accordingly, the steadfast and lasting union is to be superseded by more fluent and transient relations that may be dissolved at will. A reform of marriage in that sense is proposed as the remedy for the deplorable conditions to which we have come. That such sentiments have been uttered not only by an irresponsible novelist but by a judge of high repute shows whether we are drifting.

At once the ready retort may be made that the proposed reform is not in any conceivable sense a remedy, but that it is surrender. It gives up the whole case. It is a counsel of despair. It stands on the same plane as the brilliant suggestion that the surest means to do away with crime would be to cancel the Decalogue and the most efficacious way to stop theft and dishonesty would be to abolish property. The last things would be infinitely worse than the first. Men would rush from one marriage to another and would find happiness and contentment in none. The relaxing of the moral law cannot improve morality. Yielding to an instinct never satisfies it, but only encourages it to new and more extravagant demands. Safety for man lies only in those stern and uncompromising imperatives and inviolable prohibitions that protect him against his own wicked nature. When they are removed, he becomes the helpless prey of his sensual impulses and the toy of his passions.

An honest analysis of the situation, however, would lead to the conclusion, not that marriage is a failure, but that divorce is a failure. Not the indissoluble marriage has proved to be a failure, but the dissoluble one. It was thought that divorce would decrease unhappy marriages. It has not done so; it has increased them. That is quite in accord with the observations of experimental psychology. Man only succeeds in an enterprise, in a business or a profession, if he goes into it with the intention of staying in it. If he regards it as merely temporary, he does not think it worth while to make it a success. If, by the same token, man looks upon marriage not as a permanent thing, but a venture that may easily be rescinded at the first disappointment, he will not care enough to make it a success. He will make no supreme effort to set things right, but will permit them to go on until they become irremediable. The possibility of divorce thus produces a mental state that is calculated to make marriage a failure. And that is the truth of the matter; if marriage is a failure, it is because divorce has made it so.

There is no question but that difficulties will arise in married life. That is bound to be so, because human beings are not perfect and the close intimacy of married life will quickly disclose their shortcomings. Now, if the two partners realize that their union is permanent, they will try to adjust themselves, one to the other, in order to derive as much happiness as possible out of the unalterable condition into which they have entered. They will learn to restrain those impulses that disrupt the peace of their home and that make their life miserable. If, on the other hand, they know that it is much easier to get out of their difficulties and to change partners than to overcome

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their mean dispositions and bad habits, they will not take the trouble to practice self-control. The prospect of possible divorce paralyzes the will and induces a mental indifference that, sooner or later, will lead to grave matrimonial discord and, finally, to a complete rupture. Men will make the best of the inevitable; they will never make the best of what they can change as their fancy prompts them. By its very nature, the dissoluble marriage is fated to be a failure. The only marriage that has any chance of being a success and of bringing a maximum of happiness to man is the irrevocable marriage.

Modern marriage reform runs in the wrong direction. It goes after shadows. It imagines that it can overcome selfishness by making concessions to it and that it can stem the flood of immorality by leveling the dams. The only practical form of marriage, the only one that will be able to maintain itself, is the indissoluble marriage. In this case, as always in the moral order, the ideal and the truly practical coincide. The whole recent development bears out this truth, that the loosening of the marriage tie has not mended matters, but has only called forth demand for still greater laxity. Even now a demand for free unions and unconventional relations is made. There is no middle course; either indissoluble marriage or the destruction of marriage. One cannot stand on quicksand; it yields and slips until it has swallowed up completely whatever touches its treacherous surface.—Catholic Standard and Times.

CATHOLIC ACTION FOR THE HOME

About eleven years ago, Pope Pius X, of saintly memory, once received the visit of some 400 French children, first communicants, not one of them over eleven years of age. Accompanying a band of pilgrims, they had come to thank the Holy Father for his then recent decree on Frequent Communion. It was an inspiring sight when the great White Shepherd sat on his throne with the little army of boys and girls grouped around him. A little Parisian read the address in behalf of his companions. He alluded to the children gathering around the Saviour in Palestine and said that, in like manner, they had come to receive the blessing of their spiritual Father in Rome.

In his reply the Venerable Pontiff said in part: "The blessings of God given in the Holy Eucharist have been tasted by you even before you had full and complete knowledge of them. At your age the holy affections of the heart still look forward to the perfect development of your understanding. Let me then recommend, above all, as the fruit of your visit to the Pope, that you resolve and solemnly promise to keep on for a long time going to catechism. That is how you will perfect your knowledge of your Christian doctrine. That is how you will be the treasure of your home, whose members you will console by your conduct and by

your example alone lead to the frequent reception of Holy Communion. "At school your piety will make your companions emulate you; in the parish, the people will regard you as good as protecting angels; everywhere all about you, by your prayers, your wisdom, and the sweet force of your modesty, you will help in the conversion of sinners and in bringing back to Christ the indifferent and those who have fallen away." May not Catholic parents take these words to heart, ponder them, and make them the subject of earnest instruction to their children? They make, in effect, a real program of action for Catholic children. To prune the children's affections and to keep them centered on God, on His Church, and on the sanctuary of the home is a beautiful work for a father and mother, and will keep them in a right fear and in a trusting love of the Eternal Father in heaven, in whom all parenthood had its origin and sanction. Pursuing their parental duty in accordance with the Divine Law, they will strive by prayer and consistent reading, to know that law themselves and to make it better known to their offspring. They will have recourse to the catechism, to prayer books and to books of devotion, striving to engender by their steady use the habit of such everyday thinking as will lead to real Catholic conduct, to God's glory and the untold good of their souls.—Catholic Bulletin.

When one follows only one's own lights one follows a consummate deceiver.—St. Bernard.



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