FIVE-MINUTE SERMON

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

HALF-HEARTED CHRISTIANS

He that is not with Me is against Me. (Gospel of the day.)

These words, my dear brethren, like many others spoken by our Blessed Lord, may be interpreted in various ways. They may be understood to mean that he who is not with Christ, by being united to His true flock, who does not belong to the one Church which He has founded, is injuring the cause of Christ, is persecuting and hampering His Church in its warfare against its enemies; or, in other words, that Protestants and heretics in general, zealous Christians though they may seem to be, are really hurting Christianity about as much as they help it, if not more. And it is plain enough to us that this is true. If there had never been any heresies and schisms in the Church, we cannot doubt that there would have been now few nations not Christian.

But this, true though it may be, seems to have little practical bearing for us. We are not heretics or schismatics, and I hope that we have no inclination to be so. Still we must remember that bad Catholics do about as much harm to the work of Christ and His Church in the world as heretics. In fact, there would never have been any heretics had there not been bad Catholics to begin with.

But, after all, it does not seem that Our Lord is speaking so much of heretics, or of bad Catholics when He says: "He that is not with Me is against Me." For He goes on to tell us that "when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith, I will return to my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

The meaning of this is plain enough. It is that a man cannot give up a bad life, and then remain betwixt and between, neither bad nor good. His soul cannot stay empty, swept and garnished. He must keep the love of God in it; he must have good thoughts and do good works, or the devil will come back, take possession of the empty soul, and make it worse than it was before.

So this gives a new sense to the words, "He that is not with Me is against Me." He that is not a real good Christian, trying to live for the glory of God, and to do the work for which God has put him in the world, will be a bad one before long, if he is not already. We cannot lie low and shirk the duties which belong to us as Christians and as Catholics. We must be God's servants, and live in such a way as to be known as such, or we shall begin again to serve His enemy.

Let us take an instance, and you will see well enough what I mean. A young man or woman has been going with bad company, who though perhaps they call themselves Catholics, are a disgrace to the name, and has joined with them in all their vile conversations and sinful actions. Now, too many of those who have been living in this way seem to think that after their confession and Communion they can go back to this company and still avoid remark; that nobody will have occasion to say that they are pious, or notice any change in their life; that they can keep alright in God's sight, and also in that of their bad companions; that they can avoid doing any harm, and still do no good.

Let such remember these words: "He that is not with Me is against Me." If you want to stay in the grace of God, you must hate sin, and love virtue: and if you really do this your life and conversation will show that such is the case. You must be a friend of Christ and an enemy of the devil and of all his works, and not only be willing but proud to be known as such; if you will not do this our Lord will not have you or keep you. Choose, then, which side you will take; do not fancy that you can take neither. If you try to steer a middle course, and live an empty and unprofitable life, neither one thing nor the other, you will soon slip back just where you were before.

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER AND ST. PAUL

A decided cure for much of the introspection, the melancholia, the lack of manliness—what we may call the general softness — in Christians of to-day, is to be found in the thoughtful and, let us reverently add, the prayerful study of the character of St. Paul. Upon such study a very different type of Christian would be builded than we meet, only too often, in our ordinary walks of life.

Almighty God has set His saints before us, not for our admiration only, but for our imitation. And who so worthy of imitation as this great-hearted saint, who, with extraordinary unreserve, lays his soul bare for us, that soul too flaming with love for God and man to be bound and fettered with our conventions and our extreme self-fullness?

St. Paul loved Jesus Christ. Oh, that we knew something of that all-absorbing, passionate, and indeed absolute deserved devotion! For is not Jesus Christ just as worthy of our openly-expressed love and loyalty, unashamed and unafraid of men's opinion, as He was in the first ages of the Christian Church? Saul, indeed, on his persecuting way to Tarsus, had heard his Saviour speak to him, and had yielded his whole self to that Lord of love and life. But, if any one of us will turn resolutely, for a while, from the consideration of all earthly love whatsoever, and will look steadily upward, shall we not see our Redeemer, with His hands and feet pierced for us, and His Sacred Heart bleeding and wholly given for us, just as absolutely, just as really, as for St. Paul himself?

This is what we forget, and this is what St. Paul never forgot: "Jesus Christ loved me and gave Himself for me." We must put the stress upon these little words, and ask ourselves what they imply, and what disposition of soul their contemplation should produce in us. Why, there is enough in them to make saints of us, if we only would let them do it.

Those thoughts gave to St. Paul an intensity of purpose that overrode all obstacles and outran all difficulties. How magnificent his cry—and yet why is it not our cry as well?

Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? But in all these things we overcome, because of Him that hath loved us.

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

"We overcome—because of Him that hath loved us:" here we have the keynote to St. Paul's unflinchingly onward and upward and ever heavenward career. He always put first, in his heart, in his work, in his life, in everything, that one Divine Redeemer Who spared not Himself for us, and that heavenly Father Who "spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all;" that fathomless, priceless, boundless and undying "love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This love is "for us all."

How shall we hope to convert America—how hope to convert the world—how hope to do great things for God—unless we have, in some degree, such chivalric devotion as St. Paul possessed? Life should be lived, and work should be done, and love should be loved, in a spirit akin to this. We let ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, stoop to lower levels; we let ourselves waste ourselves on self-pity; or that more subtle self-pity contained in anxious cares and plans and hopes for those dearer to us than self. But, if we would give everything first to our Redeemer; trust Him, serve Him, think first for Him — Who so loved us as to give His own self for us all— we and our dear ones would be lifted to heights of joy and service that would far overpay our pains. For in all these things we are "more than conquerors" through our Lord Jesus Christ. —Sacred Heart Review.

HOW A SCOTTISH HIGHLAND PROTESTANT FOUND THE CHURCH

In a lengthy article dealing with the Faith in Argyllshire in bygone and present times, which appeared recently in the Casket, the writer tells the story of a wonderful conversion. He says:

A hundred years ago there was a roadside inn in a place known as the Black Mill in Lorne. The proprietor of the inn was a MacLachlan. An annual fair was held in a field in the neighborhood of the inn. Farmers and drovers from all parts of the country made a point of being present at this fair to buy and sell cattle. Amongst others, an Irish Catholic drover from Glasgow found himself at this fair. He bought cattle of the proprietor of the inn, and drove the cattle back to Glasgow. Easter duties time came; our friend, as a good Catholic, went to his confession. He accused himself of having taken a Hielandman in to the tune of £5. His reverence replied that when he made everything right with his fellow-man he might come back and receive absolution. "But, Father,' says our friend, "he is far away in Argyllshire." "It matters little," replies his reverence, "where he is; when you have done what you ought to do, come back to me." There was nothing for it, but that he must trudge back to Argyllshire. He arrived in Black Mill Inn, but not in the best of humor. He threw down his £5 note on the table and said, "That's yours; take it, and may it do you good." MacLachlan would not accept of it, as he deemed himself too cute to be taken in by an Irishman. He, however, melted, and asked for an explanation. The only explanation was that our friend was a Catholic, and as such had to confess his sins to his priest at least once a year. He had done so, and the priest would not absolve him till he had made things right with his fellow-man. "That is a strange religion," says MacLachlan, "tell me something about it." Our friend replied that he was not a scholar. He knew when he was doing right, and when he was doing wrong, but if he wished to know something about it he would speak to the priest, and perhaps he would help him. They parted friends, and our friend returned to Glasgow. He made straight for the church, and found his reverence in the confessional. He got his penance and absolution. Then he addressed his confessor, and said, "Father, that Hielandman wants to know something about our religion. Have you any books you could send to him, because he is very anxious to know and understand our Church?" The priest sent MacLachlan "Milner's End of Religious Controversy," and "The Poor Man's Catechism," and in less than six months MacLachlan came to Glasgow—perfectly instructed in the Faith—and was received by the same priest into the Church. Of MacLachlan's progeny, one was the Right Rev. John Machlan, Bishop of Galloway; another is the Rev. Duncan Brown, at present parish priest at Burnbank, Lanarkshire. This is but a beginning of Argyllshire's return to the bosom of the Catholic Church.

SAINTS AND SINNERS

The Catholic Church is not an exclusive club of the select and the responsible. The Catholic Church includes the sinner as well as the saint. It was so from the beginning; it will be so till the end. Yet, the effort of the Church will always be directed toward making her members perfect—toward so filling them with the strength and sweetness of her Divine Founder that they may glorify Him by their lives lived in accordance with His teachings.

The true Catholic is he who has such a living sense of the blessing of being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ that he guards himself carefully against giving scandal to those within or without the fold by any words or actions unworthy of a Christian. In a community containing a number of non-Catholics he is particularly mindful of showing to them, suspicious of the Church as they usually are, that the Catholic Church is a teacher of the most exalted morality; and as the spirit of any organization is judged by its expression in the lives of its members, he is watchful of his doings and sayings that he avoid even the appearance of evil.

It seems undeniable that a great many non-Catholics who admire the Church for her attitude on this or that question, are kept from entering the fold by the irregular and un-Christian lives of many who represent the Church to them. A Catholic layman speaking the other night on this subject said truly:

That so many men who admire the Church in the abstract refrain from uniting with her is often due to the convincing proofs which we in our own persons give—that the faith we proclaim as ours is not a living guiding faith, but a thing merely of form. How can we believe in the Real Presence, they reason, when from our lips fall in blasphemy the words that give to our professions the living lie? How can we believe in the God of charity and love when our thoughts and words and deeds breathe only hatred and envy and ill-will? How can we believe in a God of justice when we cheat and defraud our fellowmen and rob our laborers of their due? How can we believe that our Church leads us nearer to God and to righteousness when so often people are found aiders and abettors, openly or covertly, as instruments or principles of the new form of treason to the Republic—these terrible crimes against the purity of the ballot?

Of great importance is this matter to every one who wishes to be considered a child of the Church in very truth, to every one who wishes to think himself in true union with the spirit of the Church. For while it is undeniable that the Church is not a society of saints, but includes the sinner as well, none of us can personally fall back on that fact to excuse the wrongdoing with which we may have stained our own souls and given scandal to those who, but for us, might have seen and accepted the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church. —S H. Review.

PRACTICAL CATHOLICISM

In order that a Catholic layman may live and act within his proper sphere as such, he must not be satisfied with talking Catholicism, but he must live and discharge his duties as a Catholic—his duties to God, his family, his neighbor, his country and himself. It is only thus that he can achieve his own salvation, or by his example open the eyes of non-Catholics to the truth, the beauty, the consistency and the divinity of the doctrines and the teachings of the Catholic Church. It was thus during our civil war the Catholic clergy and the good Sisters of the various religious orders, by their self-sacrificing and charitable devotion to the wounded and dying on the battlefield, and to the sick and suffering in the hospital, did more for the cause of Catholicity than could probably have been done by the most eloquent sermons that ever fell from the lips of mortal man. The other day I saw a statement to the effect that a most careful taking of the Catholic census of the United States showed an American Catholic population of 17,029,677. Now suppose each of these Catholics carried his religion into his daily life. In other words, suppose they all lived and moved and acted within their proper sphere as Catholic laymen and did thus carry their religion into daily and hourly practice, in all their dealings with their fellow-citizens, they would soon bring into the Church millions of those who are to-day kept aloof from us by the bad and scandalous lives of those who are Catholics in name, but worse than infidels in practice. If I am correct in this, what a fearful responsibility rests on the shoulders of our bad Catholics, who, at the great accounting day, will be called upon to answer for every human soul they might and should have brought to heaven by their good example, that has been deterred from seeking and finding the truth by their scandalous lives.—Selected.

Religious Decay

The United States is sometimes cited as the classic land of indifferentism in religion—that is, apart from the Catholic body which is every day giving new signs of life and growth. Recent investigations have shown, however, that the masses of England are drifting rapidly every day away from all creeds and religious observances, and now the Consistory of Kiel furnishes statistics for Schleswig-Holstein which throws a sinister light on religious conditions in Protestant Germany. The two districts are the most Protestant portion of the Empire, the Catholics forming less than 3 per cent. of the population of over 1,500,000. The Consistory publishes figures which show that only 5 per cent. of the people attend the Sunday services. As for the Communion, excepting the persons confirmed and their relatives, only 16 per cent. of the people received it during the whole of the year 1908. The number of theological students in the University of Kiel has fallen from 106 in 1890 to only 36 in 1908. It is probable that conditions more or less similar prevail throughout the greater part of the German Empire.—Rome.

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