FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. M. BOSSAERT

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

ON DEFERRING SACRAMENTAL ABSOLUTION

During His life on earth our Lord cured a great many sufferers from physical diseases, but the number of spiritual sufferers, whom He still continues to heal, is infinitely greater. Although He Himself is perfectly sinless and absolutely holy, His Divine Heart is full of sympathy and mercy for us miserable sinners. His love and mercy led Him to institute the holy Sacrament of Penance for our consolation and welfare, in order that, after going astray, we may be delivered from the snares of Satan and brought back to the fold by the priest's absolution. The question arises whether a penitent invariably and under all circumstances ought to receive absolution, and the answer is: "No, a confessor must occasionally refuse or defer absolution." Let us consider today why and in what cases a priest is bound to act thus.

1. *Why must a priest sometimes refuse absolution?* That this is occasionally a duty on the part of the priest is plain from the words in which Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." You see that our Lord did not only commission the Apostles to forgive sins, but also to retain them; i. e., not to forgive them. Priests are bound, therefore, to carry out conscientiously this twofold commission, and sometimes to give, sometimes to withhold absolution. All good confessors have invariably acted thus, and a priest who gave absolution indiscriminately to all his penitents, whether they deserved it or not, would be taking a grave responsibility upon himself and burdening himself with the sins of others, thus imperilling his own salvation. Not only is it the duty of the confessor sometimes to refuse absolution, but it is expedient for the penitent; for should the words: *Ego te absolvo*, etc., be spoken to one whose sins ought to be retained, they would have no effect at all; the absolution would be of no avail, because the penitent is not in the right dispositions and has not complied with the necessary conditions. The immediate consequences will be that he hardens his heart, and unless he is roused from the sleep of sin by some special grace of God, so that he makes a good general confession, he will go on receiving the Sacraments in an invalid and unworthy manner, and finally perish everlastingly.

2. *In what cases must a confessor refuse absolution?* Our Divine Saviour, when instituting the holy Sacrament of Penance, said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Hence priests must refuse absolution in cases when, being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, they perceive from the penitent's statements that he has not the true spirit of penance and has not begun to think of amendment; for without an earnest purpose of amendment absolution is impossible. If, therefore, a penitent displays no genuine contrition, no true sorrow for his sins, and if he does not abhor his previous wicked life, he can not receive absolution. Or if he is resolved to lead a better life henceforth, but refuses to make sufficient satisfaction and reparation for the sins of the past, if he will not restore what he has stolen, nor retract calumnious words, he can not receive absolution. Moreover, there are many who live so that they are continually in immediate occasions of sin, and refuse to abandon this way of life, or they have acquired some vicious habit, and confess it again and again, without striving to improve in the least; such as these can not be absolved. Apart from earnest purpose of amendment there is no forgiveness; this is the teaching of common sense, as well as of the Divine law. If a man does not strive to improve, he has no desire to be delivered from sin, and therefore it can do him no good to be absolved from it.

Wherefore if you go to Confession, take care to be worthy of absolution. Prepare carefully and conscientiously for the reception of this holy Sacrament by means of a serious and thorough examination of conscience, and true repentance for all your sins, or at least for all your grievous sins, together with a firm resolution to do your best to avoid sin and the immediate occasions of sin, and to make reparation for all the harm caused by your transgressions. If, after a preparation of this kind, you make your confession in these dispositions, you may be sure of the absolution of the priest, and you may go home with the comforting assurance that God has also forgiven you. Amen.

ST. JOSEPH'S DAY—MARCH 19

St. Joseph occupies no mean place in the Divine plan. His name occurs but few times in the New Testament and he disappears entirely from our view before the beginning of our Lord's ministry. He leaves us with no vague, misty impression of what manner of man he was. St. Joseph was a laboring man, and we should call him now-a-days, with all the laboring man's virtues coupled with the gentleness and natural refinement that came as a heritage from a line of royal ancestors, for we learn from his genealogy, given us by the Holy Gospels, that he was of the house of David.

It was no small matter for a man approaching life's evening to undertake the guardianship of the Mother and her Babe; no small matter to provide for their sustenance, to shield them from danger, to direct the long flight into Egypt, and to establish a new home upon their return. Above all hoary hairs the Church has loved to honor those of St. Joseph. They are typical, alike, of tried service and of steadfast innocence. They remind us, morever, that ripened age has its proper and rightful place in the scheme of life—a fact which we are sometimes inclined to forget, more is the pity!

A nation that retains its respect for old age is in a fair way to retain everything else that is beautiful and desirable. It is one of the glories of the Catholic Church, with St. Joseph as her patron, that she lays upon her children, both as a duty and a privilege, the honoring and a tender care of the aged. This is something to think about on March 19th, which is St. Joseph's Day, and during the rest of the month, which is St. Joseph's month.—*New World*.

MACHREE

"Pray come and unfold the strange
  secret to me,
And tell what an Irishman means by
  Machree."
" 'Tis the white of the day and the
  warmth of the sun ;
The ripple of waters that laughingly
  run ;
The sweet bloom of youth, the
  harvest of years ;
The gold of all smiles and the salt of
  all tears ;
'Tis the thrill of the hand and light
  of the eye,
The glow of the cheek and the lips'
  softest sigh ;
'Tis the gladness of welcome, the
  pang of farewell,
And the loneliness left by the funeral
  knell ;
'Tis father and mother ; 'tis children
  and wife ;
The music of woman's—the wine of
  man's—life ;
'Tis all that he lives for and hopes
  for above ;
'Tis an Irishman's heart making
  vocal it's love ;
The whole of creation and one isle
  to see,
And that's what an Irishman means
  by Machree."

—Francis P. Donnelly, S. J.

LENT A SEASON OF GRACE

Ash Wednesday is a call to penance and mortification. On this day the Church summons her faithful children to the altar rail, places on their foreheads the penitential ashes, and reminds them through the mouth of her priest, that man is but dust, and to dust shall return. For forty days the Church exhorts all her members to reflect upon the solemn truths of religion, she brings them frequently before her altar, and insists upon the necessity of doing penance.

The non-Catholic world looks askance at this practice. To worldlings it smacks too much of asceticism. It was all right, they say, in the Middle Ages, which they call "Dark Ages," but will never do in the twentieth century. They forget that the need of penance and mortification is rooted in the very nature of our being.

Man is composed of a soul as well as a body. Just as the bodily functions suffer from neglect, so the more delicate operations of the soul are in danger of deterioration. The soul needs a period in the year when its interests can be consulted. Lent supplies this need.

Again, every sin contains an element of selfishness. By sin we have satisfied our own inclinations but offended God. Restoration of the right order of things demands that we make satisfaction by mortifying ourselves. Abstention from legitimate amusement for a time, acts of self restraint, doing without luxuries, depriving ourselves of the usual amount of food or drink, and redoubling our prayers and devotions are some of the ways the Church suggests for the fulfillment of the obligation of penance during Lent.

An obligation certainly exists. Our Lord has told us "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." Were it not for Lent few people would ever set aside a time for penance. Hence the insistence with which the Church has put forward the Lenten obligation. Dispensations and relaxations have mitigated the severity of the ancient penitential regime. Few are held to the strict law of fasting, and comparatively few are bound even by laws of abstinence except on a very few days, yet all are bound to perform some acts of penance and mortification.

The reaction from the stress and strain of War has produced an almost universal relaxation. Extravagance, worldliness, and pleasure have succeeded the days of hardship and sacrifice. The world today is in sore need of reflection and regeneration. It needs to go down on bended knee and ask forgiveness of God for past sins of omission and commission. Catholic and non-Catholic alike can with profit employ the holy season of Lent in acts of self examination, heart scrutiny and sincere contrition, with the renewed purpose of re-ordering their lives. It is a time of grace and opportunity. Perhaps for many it will be the last Lent upon earth.

Every Catholic Church provides devotions for the faithful during this holy season. All should profit by the opportunities Lent affords for taking a thorough spiritual accounting.—*The Pilot*.

WHY DO THE IRISH LOVE IRELAND ?

Why do the Irish love Ireland ?
  Arrah, you never'll know ;
You've got to be born to feel it,
  you've got to be tempered so ;
There's the sweet little bog and the
  boreen, shamrocks and primrose fair,
And the softest kind of a twilight
  that lingers forever there ;
There's the love and the laugh and
  the music, prayer and the Vesper chime,
And bells that ring out forever and
  echo off into rhyme ;
There's the Mass and the wake and
  the shelling, tongues' with the
  tender word,
And throats with songs the rarest—
  the like you have never heard!

There's the bird calls out in the
  meadow, and shamrocks and
  daisies fair,
And the prettiest smilin' colleens
  that's sometimes a'trippin'
  there ;
And your thoughts go off to the seashore, the pretty lochs and the
  bay,
But you're never longin' to leave her;
  your feet they would never
  stray;
It's only the " Wild Geese " yonder,
  thank God, who have wings to
  fly,
But what is the use o' grievin', some
  day is will all blow by ;
And tho' lovin', 'tis far or near her,
  she's a mother sweet to us
  all—
That's why the Irish love Ireland ;
  that means the Irish all.

That love is a love that's sweeter
  than all of the world beside,
That's why we'd give our heart's
  blood — an' sure it is not
  denied !
Give it to save and place her with
  the smile that she had before,
When she set like a queenly virgin,
  the harp soundin' on her
  shore.
Our love will be never wantin' the
  tender touch it should know,
Sweet as a summer fragrance, soft
  as the winds that blow ;
And the bond that doth bind, would
  we sever ? Ah, never while
  Ireland's green !
Should she sink in the sea forever,
  she'd still be our Island Queen.

—Dr. James Henderson

WHY THE CRUCIFIX IS ORDERED AWAY

The guardians of the purity of the faith of the Church of England want no figure of Christ on the memorials to their dead. It makes, they believe, for superstition. The crucifix is therefore to be set aside as a discredited relic of the ignorant past.

Most Englishmen, however humble their education, will not be guilty of offering divine adoration to the wood or the stone or the metal out of which the image of the Crucified is made. They bow indeed before the material figure, but they refer the homage to Him who is sculptured. They are not idolaters. They understand that inspiration comes and comes legitimately from the spectacle of the sensible figure that is set before them. They are neither idolaters nor iconoclasts, that is, when left to themselves.

It is much to be feared that those who are so anxious to preserve their spiritual disciples from the guilt of superstition are themselves abandoning faith in the divinity of Him Who was Crucified for the redemption of the race. But what of Christ? Whose Son is He? Do not the grave and reverend divines of the English Church answer, "David's?" And are they not entirely satisfied when they set forth His human genealogy? Are they not prepared to neglect altogether, His divine descent? In a word, do they believe that the Messiah is the natural and generated Son of God? We fear not. And it is for that reason that they do not want the image of Christ Crucified held up as a reminder to the wayfarer, who believes that Christ is the only Begotten Son of God, equal to the Father in all things.

Faith in the divinity of Christ is fast vanishing from the world, or at least from that part of the world which takes no instruction and inspiration from the Catholic Church. And that too is a pity. The charge of superstition which has served the enemies of the gospel so destructively will be leveled more and more against the most sacred of Catholic practices. If the crucifix is the parent of superstition, the Mass and the Sacraments must be the quintessence of superstition. And so it comes that Christ is dethroned. Christians outside the Catholic Church will satisfy their faith by conceding Him an honorable place among the notables of the race. His Godhead they will not, and cannot admit.—*Catholic Transcript.*

The rule of my life is to make business a pleasure, and pleasure my business.—Aaron Burr.

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