

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. M. DOSSAERT

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

THE MAN POSSESSED BY A DEVIL IS
A TYPE OF THE SINNER

St. Matthew records in somewhat more detail the same miracle of which we read in today's Gospel. He tells us: "Then was offered to Him (Jesus) one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb." It very often happened, when a devil took possession of a man's body, that he was rendered blind or dumb, deaf or lame, being prevented from using one or more of his senses. In this case the man possessed by a devil was certainly most miserable, for he lived in the world, but could see nothing of all around him, being encompassed by impenetrable darkness. He had lost the use of his speech, and could not communicate his sorrows and suffering to anyone, nor seek sympathy in his troubles.

This poor man is a type of a sinner. In his case the devil had taken bodily possession of him, and in a similar fashion, when a man sins, he opens the door of his heart to his enemy, who enters and takes possession of him spiritually, influencing more or less all his actions, thoughts and desires. The man brought to our Lord was blind and dumb in consequence of being possessed by a devil, and in the same way the sinner is blind and dumb spiritually blind and dumb.

1. A sinner lives in the Church of God like a blind man in the world; he is a wretched, unhappy creature, perceiving nothing of the dignity and beauty of the Church. He is blind, for he cannot see the way that leads to salvation, and so he wanders along devious paths, hurries irresistibly down towards the abyss, not looking whether he goes and not recognizing his peril. A sinner is blind as to his own condition. A man whose eyesight has failed him is aware that he may easily miss the right road, and so he trusts others to guide him. But a sinner, being spiritually blind, considers himself enlightened, and believes that he is going along a safe road; he stands on the brink of a precipice and refuses to see it. A sinner is blind as to the nature of sin, which he regards as something quite unimportant, as the result of human weakness, which God overlooks or at least readily forgives. He is blind, too, as to the consequences of sin in time and in eternity, and looks upon penance as quite unnecessary, failing to recognize God's punishments in the misfortunes that befall him, and deeming himself far too good for hell, which was, in his opinion, created only for thieves and murderers.

2. The sinner is also spiritually dumb. He does not seek to praise God, for he never prays, and mentions God only in order to blaspheme, abuse, curse and calumniate Him; it is impossible really to pray with fervor and sincerity, and to continue to be a sinner. He is dumb, when he ought to speak and prevent others from sinning. How many fathers and mothers, how many employers and superiors refrain from speech and say nothing, when they notice anything wrong in the case of their children or subordinates! How many children and servants are dumb, when they know that their companions are acting wickedly! They are silent, instead of communicating their knowledge to the proper people, in order that sin may be averted and the wrongdoing remedied. A sinner is often dumb when he ought to confess his sins in the Sacrament of Penance, and this renders him the most miserable of men, since he conceals his malady from the physician who could cure him, and thus the disease consumes his strength until at last he succumbs completely to it.

You see, therefore, what is the sinner's plight; he is blind and dumb; and we are all, more or less, a prey to these afflictions, because we are all sinners. St. John writes: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Who is there able to heal us, to open our eyes and restore our speech? Jesus Christ, who cured the man possessed by a devil, alone can cure us; but He is willing to help us, and He is particularly willing now, when Easter is near at hand; He will cast out the evil spirit from our hearts when we make our Easter Confession, and will Himself come to be our guest at our Easter Communion.

Hasten, therefore, to the Divine Physician, and implore Him to open your eyes, that you may realize the condition of your soul, and see all your sins, and then confess them frankly and honestly, with true contrition, in the holy Sacrament of Penance, and thus you will be reconciled with your heavenly Father, and as children of God, will walk henceforth on the right way. Amen.

FAITH AND THE CONVERT

Some few years ago a convert to Catholicism told in these words why he made the change:

"I became a convert because of the certainty of Catholics. They not only believe their Church is right, and the only one that is right, but they know it and feel it in their marrow—they have faith. I got talking religion the other day to a bricklayer who was working for me, and asked him 'Are you so dead sure that the Catholic religion is true and just as Christ left it?'"

"Sure!" he exclaimed, as he put a brick in place and troweled it with mortar. "I am as sure of it as that this brick will never come out!" Then laying another brick, he added, "I'm surer. Man lays bricks: God Himself laid Peter's Rock."

"This was the final impulse that sent me to seek instruction. I wanted to be sure."

MASS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

REV. B. N. O'REILLY

If the Mass be a "superstition and a blasphemous fable" we may say that the Church fell into evil ways in the very first days of her existence. It is contended by Harnack that the Christian Church up to the middle of the third century did not possess the sacrifice of the Mass as the Church now understands it. If this be true then the Council of Trent errs when it declares that in the Mass "the Priests offer up, in obedience to the command of Christ, His Body and Blood."

It may be admitted that the early Church paid more attention to the spiritual and subjective side of sacrifice and laid particular stress on prayer and thanksgiving in the Eucharistic rite. This does not mean that the early Church rejected the objective sacrifice and believed that only a spiritual sacrifice was expressed by "Eucharistic thanksgiving." It cannot be denied that there has been a dogmatic development and that the Church has passed from an indefinite to a definite statement regarding the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. It is only an assumption and it has not been proved that the Church has made any change in her idea of the Mass. The oldest literary monument that we have, which dates back to the latter part of the first century and which is called "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," refers to the "breaking of bread" as a "sacrifice." It refers to the words in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, where one must be reconciled with one's enemies before the sacrifice. In conclusion this work refers to the prophecy of Malachi, which shows that it considered the Eucharistic rite as objective and real sacrifice. The earliest positive statement that we find is from Ignatius of Antioch, who died in the year 107, and was a disciple of the Apostles. Speaking of the Eucharist he says, "There is only one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, only one chalice containing His one Blood, and one Altar, as also one Bishop with the priesthood and the deacons." Since he refers to an "Altar" and a "priesthood" he evidently means that there is a real sacrifice in the Eucharist.

It is urged that many of the early writers, notably Justin the Martyr, referred to prayer and thanksgiving as the "one perfect sacrifice acceptable to God." From this they argue that interior spiritual sacrifice was the only one known in the early Church. That Justin the Martyr did not exclude an exterior and objective sacrifice is evident from his Dialogue, in which he speaks of the "food offering" of the lepers as a gift offering and a figure of the Bread of the Eucharist, which Jesus commanded to be offered in commemoration of His sufferings. He then speaks of the sacrifices which the Jews formerly offered and of which Malachi spoke when he declared that the Lord would have no further pleasure with them. He then continues "by the sacrifices, however, which we Gentiles present to Him in every place, that is of the Bread of the Eucharist and likewise of the Chalice of the Eucharist. He then said that we glorified His Name who are His deacons. This surely means an objective sacrifice. The early Christians may not have been explicit in their words concerning the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but we must bear in mind that they were restrained by the "discipline of the secret" and in many instances they wished to repudiate any connection with the pagan sacrifices. The words of Tertullian are quite plain: "We offer no sacrifice because we cannot eat both the spirit of God and of demons." That he does not in these words deny the existence of a Christian sacrifice is evident from a Christian passage where he calls Holy Communion "participation in the sacrifice," which is accomplished "on the altar of God." When we come to the time of Irenaeus of Lyons, who died in the middle of the second century, we find a complete and clear statement that the Eucharist is a true sacrifice. He speaks of "bread and wine" as objective gift offerings and maintains that these elements become the "Body and Blood" of the Lord through consecration. This is the Mass as celebrated in the Catholic Church today. In his letters against heretics he declares that the Church alone "offers the pure oblation" but the Jews "did not receive the Word which is offered to God."

The testimony of Saint Augustine is even more clear and explicit. He declares most emphatically that every religion, whether true or false, must have an exterior form of celebration and worship. He speaks of the Christians who "commemorate the sacrifice consummated on the Cross by the holiest oblation and participation of the Body and Blood of Christ." In his City of God he says that the Mass is the "highest and true sacrifice," Christ being at once "Priest and Victim." He reminds the Jews that the sacrifice of Malachi is now made in every place from the rising of the sun to

the going down thereof. He tells how his mother, Monica, asks that she be remembered at the altar and that she had assisted daily at Mass. From the time of Augustine down to the Reformation there is a constant belief in the Christian Church that the Mass is a sacrifice in the true sense of that word. If the Catholic Church today is guilty of idolatry, if the Mass be a "superstition and a blasphemous fable," the Church fell into that superstition in Apostolic times and the earliest and greatest doctors of the Church propagated and defended this "blasphemous fable."

POPULARITY NO STANDARD

The Dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral, London, the Hon. Dean, as he is called by his fellow Anglicans, preached a rather startling sermon a few Sundays since. Only during the last week did the text reach the United States. The Dean finds little hope for anything. Civilization has gone to the eternal bow-wows, the Church has proved a miserable failure, and the world will never again be a good place to live in. The only hope is for the Church to come down from its pedestal and regain its former popularity with the masses.

The Church of which the Dean is an estimable clergyman may have placed itself upon a pedestal. It might do "the Church by law established," that church which is ruled by royal blood, a great deal of good to get down among the masses and make itself popular. Speaking for the old Mother Church, she has never placed herself upon a pedestal. She has always gloried in being the Church of the masses but she will never be popular.

If the Church of Christ became popular it would be at the expense of the commission that Christ gave to her. It would mean that she was false to the example of Christ Himself. The Church can achieve popularity only by pandering to the passions of men, by sanctioning divorce, condoning impurity, by overlooking dishonesty and by closing her eyes to the perversity of nations and of individuals. Christ would have been popular had He kept silent when confronted by the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees. Had the Baptist been kind, indulgent and diplomatic when brought into the presence of the pair of adulterers, he might have retained his popularity and his head. Had he ranted about the sacredness of human love, which is so common today, he would have won rounds of applause. It was a most undiplomatic and unpopular thing for him to do when he hurled at the head of the tetrarch that uncompromising sentence: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Had the martyrs renounced their faith they would have been popular with the Caesars.

THE DEPARTED CANNOT RETURN

Recent effusions of scientists who have achieved a really notable place among the world's great scientific men show clearly that the "workman should stick to his last." The unfortunate and unenviable figure that they cut when they leave their chosen realm and dabble in matters beyond their experience, training and discretion is proof certain that error is always ready to get new proponents.

None will for a moment question the veracity and natural ability of Sir Oliver Lodge along the lines of his chosen profession. He exceeds his powers and training, however, when he attempts to console the world by telling it that there is real communication between the souls of the departed and men in this life.

It is demonstrable that spirits have often deceived men. Under exorcism they have declared their real identity. They have admitted that they were fallen spirits and had deluded their hearers. The most preposterous and irrational messages have at times proceeded from these agencies. Dabbling with the spirit world has been proclaimed even in these recent days to be a source of extreme danger to the experimenters. One college stated that the use of the ouija board had threatened to wreck the nerves of many of its students. As a matter of plain fact, even considering the phenomena from a rational point of view, it is evident that the departed cannot and do not communicate with the living.

That there is something marvelous can be admitted. But that these marvels proceed from our departed is untenable. A just and wise God cannot be the author of frivolities. Nor can His good angels be the agencies at work, for the reason that they are the friends of God and act only at His bidding. Granted that the

lost souls might, absolutely speaking, communicate their thoughts to the spirit intelligences, and through them manifest their state or thoughts to men, what would they have to communicate that would be of advantage to the world? Their fallen state would make men shudder and turn them forever against such practices. This would put an end to dabbling with the spirits and they know it too well to try it. Hence it is not they who appear and speak. It cannot be the saved who communicate, because they are the friends of God and act only at His command. The departed by death have lost the means of communication with earth and material things.

It is not God, therefore, not the good angels nor the lost or saved souls, hence it must be the satanic agencies at work to deceive men and draw them aside for their own spiritual and often temporal ruin. It is particularly unfortunate to see otherwise clever men lend themselves to this fraud. It is clear that the closer man "sticks to his last" the safer he is.—The Pilot.

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

The first effect of the Blessed Eucharist is to unite us ultimately with Jesus Christ, not only by faith and charity, but also by the Real Presence of His sacred flesh and precious blood.

The second effect is to augment, confirm and preserve in us the spiritual life of grace. That is to say, it renders it firmer, because the health of the soul becomes stronger by partaking of that divine nourishment. It preserves it by the strength which it gives us, enabling us to resist all that might deprive us of it, whether coming from the devil, the world or the flesh. "As the living Father hath sent Me," says Christ, "and I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me shall live by Me."

The third effect of the Blessed Eucharist is to weaken concupiscence and to moderate the violence of our passions. Concupiscence is the inclination we have to sin. The term "passions" includes all the disorderly motions which urge us to sin; pride, greed, revenge, anger, lust. The Blessed Eucharist weakens the inclination to sin by making it less active. It moderates the violence of our passions; calms and checks them.

The fourth effect is to give us the pledge of eternal life and of a glorious resurrection; of life everlasting; the life enjoyed by the blessed in Heaven. Our Lord and Saviour has promised that the just shall rise in a glorified state at the end of the world. Such being this great and glorious sacrament, we are required to prove ourselves before receiving it, bearing in mind the warning that he who eateth unworthy eateth damnation to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord. We are therefore obliged to examine carefully the state of our soul, in the light of our conscience; and we must seek the Sacrament of Penance with honest and proper dispositions, and there accuse ourselves of our sins, and ask for absolution from the priest who gives it as the appointed minister of the sacrament, by the power of Christ. We must repent; we must resolve to break habits of sin and to avoid persons and places which are the proximate cause of sin to us. We must be animated by faith, hope and charity. Faith must be lively, that is, it must be accompanied by charity. Without charity it is dead. Hope is the virtue which makes us expect, with firm confidence, from the infinite goodness of God, all the blessings He has promised to us; His grace in this life; and His glory in the next. Faith is a virtue which makes us believe in God and in all truths which He has revealed and proposes to us by His Church.

Hope is firm when it is accompanied by a great confidence in the goodness of God. Such confidence was possessed by St. Paul when he said: "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? Or distress? Or famine? Or nakedness? Or the sword? (As it is written: For thy sake we are put to death, all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.) But in all these things we overcome. Become 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 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."

Charity is a virtue which makes us love God above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Charity should be ardent; and it is ardent when it is accompanied by a holy fervor, so that it may be felt in our hearts.

These three virtues, faith, hope and charity are called the theological virtues because they relate immediately to God. God is believed in by faith; He is expected by hope; and He is loved by charity.

To approach the Blessed Eucharist worthily we must have these virtues. We must also have sentiments of humility, adoration and gratitude. If, thus animated, we are without grievous sin, or have confessed our sins and honest dispositions for our future conduct, and have been absolved in the Sacrament of Penance, we are entitled to receive the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist.

If we receive it otherwise we are worse off than we were before; having added to all our other sins the horrible sin of sacrilege.—The Casket.

THE FAITH OF PASTEUR

The faith of a scientist has been unveiled in no more striking manner in the nineteenth century than by the life and words of the century's greatest scientist, Louis Pasteur. Any doubts that may have existed about Pasteur's practical Catholicity have been finally cleared away by a letter from the chancellor of the diocese of St. Claude where Pasteur was born and raised and where his remains lie buried, between those of his good Catholic father and mother. The chancellor also verifies the oft quoted words spoken by Pasteur a

few years before his death at the commencement exercises of the College of Dole. "When one has studied much he comes back to the faith of the Breton peasant; as to me I studied more, I would have the faith of the Breton peasant woman." Science with faith produced Pasteur, Mendel, Volta and others; science without faith has produced Huxley, Spencer, Darwin and their followers.—The Pilot.

Faith is all powerful: it conquers everything, and despises worldly goods, since it is sure of eternal bliss.—Savonarola.

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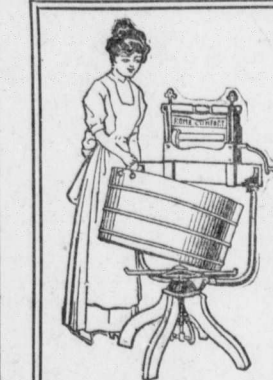
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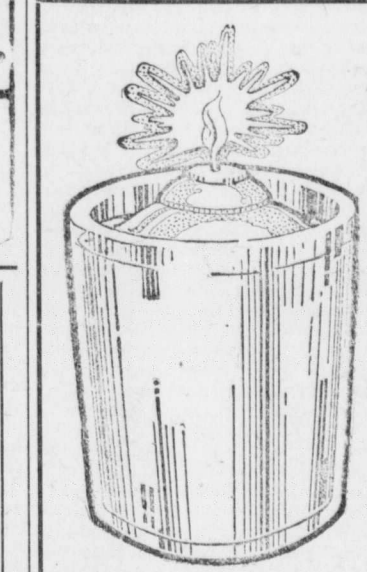
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