

**FIVE MINUTE SERMON**

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**

**DIFFICULTIES**

"And behold, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves. But He was asleep. And His disciples came to Him, and awaked Him, saying: Lord, save us, we perish. And Jesus saith to them: Why are ye fearful? O ye of little faith!" (Matt. viii. 24, 25, 26.)

Our lives are beset by many difficulties. They are of two kinds, moral and physical. Moral difficulties cause hindrances to us principally in our spiritual life, while physical difficulties affect us in our earthly life. The former can arise from within, such as are caused by temptations and passions, or from without, such as come from the bad example of many people, and the influence it is liable to have over us. The latter also may come from within or without. Our internal physical difficulties come principally from diseases that so often take hold of our mortal bodies. These may originate, as is often the case, from external agents, but once they have hold of us, they take root in us and thrive without any help from the person, place or thing from which they sprang. The external physical difficulties that we are apt to meet at some time in life come principally from violence or accidents or misfortunes of various kinds. As a general rule all difficulties, whether moral or physical, whether springing from within or from without, affect us totally. This is principally due to the fact of the close union of soul and body. Man is composed of body and soul, which are so united that once they are separated he dies. It is not difficult, then, to understand how, when man is affected by difficulties in either body or soul, his whole being is more or less disturbed.

Difficulties, as the word itself implies, are contrary to our feelings and desires, and as such, we are naturally anxious to avoid them. If we can not avoid them, we wish at least to be able to withstand them or to overcome them. Most of us, no matter how huge the difficulties we encounter, would rather come out of them alive, though perhaps bereft of everything earthly, than to succumb to their weight. Now, many of the physical difficulties men encounter can not be avoided. We may meet unexpected disaster in a railroad wreck, or in a fire; a flood may come over our city or our country and we may be drowned; a thunderbolt from heaven may take life from us in an instant. It is certain that such physical evils can not always be avoided. All these arise from things that are beyond the knowledge, power, and the foresight of man. There is no place where man may betake himself and be free from the danger of such difficulties. None of the mishaps commonly experienced in a rushing, busy world would perhaps come upon a man living in a secluded and lonely place, but difficulties of some other nature would be his lot. If nothing else, it would be a disease, or some other cause, that would smite him from earth. Physical difficulties can and will destroy our earthly life. They may not do so until our earthly course is run, but then they will do it.

We must speak differently of moral difficulties. They, too, are inevitable, but can be withstood, at least to the extent of saving ourselves from moral ruin or moral death. God will give us power, provided we use the means He has placed at our disposal, to save our spiritual life. Death need never overtake it; it never need be near the brink of eternal perdition. We can curb passions, we can overcome temptations; we can avoid or resist the bad example of others and never allow it to influence us. The stronger we are, also, to resist moral difficulties, the less will physical difficulties affect our moral nature.

This great truth ever should be present in the mind of the Christian. He never should forget that some physical trouble will cause life to leave his body, but difficulties of any kind whatsoever need never destroy his spiritual life. And when he faces the unavoidable parting from the world, what need he care, if his soul retains its life? When he will face the inevitable difficulty that will cause his soul to leave his body, if God's grace adorns his soul, it will be turned into the greatest of blessings for him.

We always should remember that though in every instance God will not protect us from difficulties that can destroy our mortal life, He will, however, always be with His faithful servants to save us from the destruction that could be caused in our souls by moral difficulties. Then, too, because we are His children, He does protect us from many difficulties. We should ever be in His divine grace, for then we will be prepared to meet all obstacles to our moral and physical well-being. And if this state does not save us from the death of the body, it certainly will save us from eternal death, or the death of the soul. If we live properly in this world, even the difficulties opposed to our temporal welfare and life will not be so much feared by us, for we will realize that, though they may destroy our body, they can never destroy our soul.

The apostles in the Gospel of today were losing hope for their temporal safety. Christ reprimanded them for it. Their fear was natural, but Christ wished to teach them a lesson. Even if the boat had overturned and they had been swallowed up by the waves, what would they have lost? They would have lost their earthly lives, but we feel sure—being, as they were, in the immediate presence of Christ—that they would have been saved for eternity. They should not have been so greatly disturbed when they knew who was with them. So, as regards ourselves, when we can not avoid the difficulties and the different fatalities of life, and we are in God's grace, we should endeavor to resign ourselves to the result, whatever it be. God will protect us in one way or the other, and his way will be the wisest, and the best way for us, even though it appear not clearly so to us at the time.

honor of some particular home of higher learning. Time has rung many changes as the years have sped by, but the great central point in University work remains as of old. The highest peak in intellectual endeavor is still, as always, the ideal set before professor and student. New would-be champions have appeared in the lists. Some, with visor down and devoid of any distinguishing characteristic, others, equally ready for the fray, but with devices that all may see and understand, yet all desperately intent on victory, have entered the mental arena against natural truth confirmed by revelation and against revealed truth itself. The Church has her knights sworn to defend the sacred deposit of faith; of the outcome no fear need be entertained. But the onlookers, the grooms, the squires, what of them? How will they fare? The senseless and superstitious practice of settling matters of right and fact by an appeal to judicial combat owes its origin to an Arian king, Gonibald of Burgundy, back in A. D. 500. This criminal procedure spread, to some extent, among Catholics, though many Popes from Nicholas I. to Paul IV. repeatedly condemned it. Unhappily, it quite suited a temperament which delighted in feats of prowess and daring and gloried in mere brute force. To us it seems the pitch of absurdity that greater skill at one end of a lance should be thought fit to establish the innocence of an accused person or the genuineness of a signature in for, short of duly manifested Divine assurance or intervention, such a state of mind is rankly superstitious.

But, let us tread softly. The scene is shifted now, but the old leaven of superstition has not disappeared altogether from the mass of humanity, nor even from all who consider themselves cultured. In a war of words, how often the man with the most copious vocabulary is looked upon as the winner! It is the old story of O'Connell and the fishwife over again. Take the vagaries of Christian Science, which, in itself, so utterly degrades Christ. Its principles and deductions have no more logical sequence than can be found in the names of a string of Pullman cars; yet, by painting gaudy pictures of "the whatness of the which in the light of the glad hitherto which is to come," it has drawn thousands of amiable and well-meaning people away from Christ and has left them to wash in a placid, moonlit mill-pond of spiritual bewilderment.

We may vote, we may sign commercial and legal papers, we may even contract marriage by proxy. So be it. But how many there are who violently extend the law and do all their thinking by proxy! There must be recognized and duly accredited leaders of sound Catholic thought, men who can think correctly and correctly express what they think. A Thomas Aquinas in his ancestral halls would have remained a petty Italian noble; now the whole world honors him with its love or its hatred. No man hates that which deserves only his contempt. The Universities gave Thomas Aquinas to the world.

Furthermore, although their reasoning is faulty, we must take into consideration those who gauge a man's respectability by the size of his house or the extent of his landed estate. To such, and they are fairly numerous, the strongest appeal is made by piles of brick or museums of showy apparatus or football fields and the like, since anybody with eyes can see them. If a University, therefore, is to claim and hold its proper place in the estimation of the general public, it must have a staff of professors with suitable equipment becomingly housed, and there must be a "gridiron." All tastes having been taken into consideration, the University is ready to function. The field of its activities, we may truly say, is now coterminous with that of human activities. Body and soul, mind and muscle, come within its purview. Let us study this point.

The Church looks to the University for timely help. Postgraduate courses for those who are preparing to occupy professors' chairs in the higher branches of learning, especially in philosophy, theology, canon law, and history, are among the means by which the University becomes the handmaid of the Church. In a University, too, can be gathered under one roof rare and costly volumes which, when thus assembled, are within reach of inquirers who would otherwise remain strangers to many of the treasures of ancient and modern lore.

Always abreast of the times, the Church looks to the same source for efficient cooperation in training qualified men for very special home-mission and social work, which is already a matter of prime importance and promises to grow and spread in a marvellous way.

If a somewhat flippant word may be used in a serious connection, we are free to say that education has always been a pet project of the Church. The simplicity of guileless infancy is dear to the Sacred Heart of our Divine Lord; and among adults, the nearest approach to it is found in those giant intellects which, having drunk long and deeply of the undefiled fountain of learning, realize their own littleness and insufficiency. Minds venerated with greatness are often insufferably pretentious and lordly; the truly great mind acknowledges

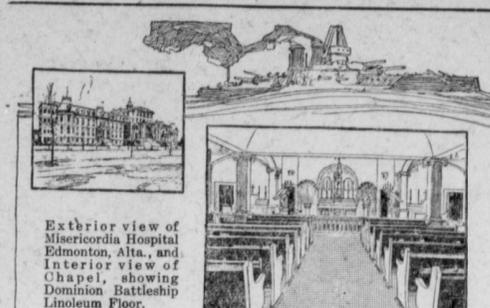
its limitations. A teacher may be hired to teach any secular branch from the primer to academic degrees; but a teacher who is to mould the mind and heart of the pupil and to prepare him for an honorable position in life calls for a formation in keeping with the dignity of the proposed work. It is in the department of pedagogy that the University helps the Church by using ripe knowledge in weighing the merits of methods of instruction and in imparting them to our future teachers.

While all admit that there is a line between darkness and light, who would venture to trace that line? There is a midway which is not dark nor is it light. So in great moral subjects which have to do with the rights of property and life, not to mention other things, is often a half-gloom in which the mature knowledge of dispassionate, disinterested, and reflective minds must study, weigh and decide. Especially in law and medicine, therefore, the University helps the Church.

The Church teaches all men and is taught by none; she is taught of God. In her "divine" appointed mission as teacher of faith and morals to the whole human family, she needs no outside help for her guidance, but she does need and earnestly seeks all possible outside help in discharging her sacred trust. She holds aloft the unquenchable torch of faith and she bears the unerring measure of morals; she calls for the cooperation of her children that, as all men may see that light and make that measure their own. In all this the Universities are singularly qualified to cooperate with the Church. That

they may live and flourish and thrive to God's greater glory, should be the prayer on the lips and in the hearts of all the faithful. HENRY J. SWIFT, S. J.

All is a perpetual flux upon the earth.—Rousseau. Laws are essential emanations from the self-poised character of God.—Tupper.



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