

IV  
As grangrene taints the blood,  
Nor rest till the whole frame be  
quite subdued,  
So gradual is thy growth,  
In noble souls, thou unseem rust  
of sloth!  
Writhing with unfeet shame,  
We loathe thy yoke, yet loathing  
live the same.  
O subtle paced and velvet footed  
evil,  
Let one among thy slaves have leave  
to call thee—devil!  
TO BE CONTINUED

A GOSSIPLESS SEWING  
CIRCLE

"I really wish you could have timed your visit so as to be here last week," said Aunt Amelia Bates, rousing her niece with eyes that betrayed no sign of the little nap into which she had unintentionally fallen. "The sewing circle met with me Wednesday and we had a most delightful time."  
"Some particularly interesting piece of gossip?" asked Miss Eleanor, mischievously.  
"There wasn't any gossip, and there never is," answered the old lady, with dignity. "That is one of our strictest rules."

"A gossipless sewing circle! Why, that makes it almost unique, doesn't it?" "Has it always been conducted on that plan?"  
"Not always, but a good while," replied Aunt Amelia. "Let's see—what year was it that the gristmill burned?"  
"A certain well-known twinkle in her eye showed that some little story was lurking in the near background that might be coaxed forth without much trouble."

"Yes, it was thirty years ago last October that Mark Hoyt's mill burned," she went on, after a little urging. "Mark's grandfather left him property, though not so much as people had expected, and he and his wife—she was Hattie Perley, from over in Oakfield—cut a good deal of a dash for a little while. But he hadn't shown much head for business, and it was generally understood that he had lost pretty nearly everything except the mill, and that even was almost an elephant on his hands, what with being out of repair and needing new machinery. So when the mill burned one night, it made a good topic of conversation for our sewing-circle that happened to meet the next day with Mrs. Sylvester."

"How plain the talk in Mrs. Sylvester's parlor that afternoon comes back to me after all these years! At first none of the ladies seemed to want to speak right out what they thought, but everybody was ready enough to hint all around it. Mr. Bragg began by asking if anybody knew just how much the mill was insured for, and Mrs. Shaw said she understood there was nearly \$8,000 on it, which was a good deal more than the mill was worth."  
"Then Mrs. Saunders wanted to know if it was true that Mark had been trying to borrow money lately, and Mrs. Squire Mace said she wasn't at liberty to tell what she knew about that."

"Mrs. Sylvester said that she would not want to be quoted, but a certain person had told her husband that he had it pretty straight that Mark had been seen coming away from the mill about an hour before the fire was discovered, and we all allowed that that looked a little queer."  
"Aunt Loviny Farley asked Mrs. Mace if setting fire to property in the night, for the sake of getting the insurance, wasn't against the law, and Mrs. Mace said that that would be arson, which was a state's prison crime. Mrs. Timmons said she never supposed Mark would come to that, though she guessed that, in his younger days, he'd sowed some oats of a kind they didn't grind in the mill."

"Then old lady Shattuck said there were some bad streaks in the Hoyt blood; and she went on to tell a long story about how Mark's great-uncle Daniel started off to go fishing one Sunday, and his horse stepped into a hole in the road and broke his leg, and had to be killed, and Daniel went right straight to church with his old clothes on, pretending that there was where he had started for in the first place, and the next day sued the town, and finally got damages, which the law wouldn't have given him if it could have been proved that he was travelling for pleasure or on business on the Sabbath day."  
"When she got done, I put in my word, and said that there was nothing that would bring a man to ruin much quicker than an extravagant wife, I don't know why," said it, either, for I had always liked Hattie Hoyt, even if she did dress a little better than some others. But that is always the way; when that kind of talk is going on, it is easy to join in."

"Mrs. Parks had been looking dreadful mysterious all the while, as if she knew a good deal, when somebody asked her what she thought, she only shook her head, 'I'm one of the kind,' she said, 'that when they can't say anything good about people, don't say anything at all.' Then she shut her lips together, and kept on looking mysterious."  
"Finally Lois Griffin spoke up and said that she wasn't afraid to express her opinion right out loud before any one; but that was as far as Lois ever got, for Lo and behold! there was Mrs. Hattie Hoyt standing right in the doorway."

"How she'd got there unknown to us was a puzzle at the time; but it seems that she had gone round to the back door and knocked, and

Lyddie Ellen, Mrs. Sylvester's youngest, had let her in and helped her off with her things in the kitchen, and then she had walked through to the best room without one of us hearing her."

"But at any rate, there she was now and how much she had heard we did not know. She was pale, and her eyes looked as if she'd been having a good cry; but after we had all said 'How-do!' and she had been given a seat, she appeared more at her ease than anybody else in the room."  
"She said we must excuse her for being late, and even as it was, she had only run in 'or a few minutes while Mark was trying to get a nap. 'He has been in a terrible state all day,' she said 'and I knew that he was keeping something back from me. But finally I made him tell me what was on his mind, and he is feeling better now.'"  
"When she said that, so innocently, I guess we all caught our breath, but she didn't seem to notice it."  
"Mark tells me," she said, "that the insurance on the mill ran out three weeks ago, and he hadn't got it renewed; so the fire has left us with almost nothing that we can call our own. Mark blames himself for neglecting it," she said, "though I guess it was partly because he didn't have the money handy to pay. But I tell him that I shall be glad and thankful to my dying day that there was no insurance, for if there had been I suppose some people would have been ready to say that he set the fire himself to get the money."

"And when she said that, she didn't raise her voice a bit or seem any ways put out. She was always gentle and mild spoken, and never more so than when she was going. Of course Mrs. Sylvester urged her to stay, at any rate, till after supper; but she said that she mustn't leave Mark any longer."  
"As soon as she had fairly gone Lois Griffin said, 'I don't know how it is with the rest of you, but I, for one, feel as if humble-pie was about all I need for my supper.'"  
"Well," said Mrs. Parks, speaking in a way that she had, as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, 'I'm sure that I didn't say anything.'"  
"At that, Lois turned on her. 'Yes, you did, too,' she said, 'and you need not pretend! You as much as said there wasn't any good that you could say of the Hoyts! And it was not so. Mark Hoyt was always kind and generous when he had anything to do with; and there's a number of good things that you could say about Hattie: one is that she was never given to backbiting her neighbors.'"  
"But there, what's the use?" Lois went on, a little cooler. "I guess this is a case where the pot needs't call the kettle black. But I hope we have all learned a lesson, and I'm going to propose that we make it a rule at our circle hereafter to talk about something else besides people."

"Well, we all agreed to that; and I suppose this was the beginning of our gossipless sewing-circle, as you call it."  
"What became of Mr. and Mrs. Hoyt?" asked Eleanor. "I think I never knew of their living here."  
"Oh, they moved away long before your time. The mill burning down proved to be a good thing for Mark, even if it wasn't insured. He sold the site to Squire Mace for a small sum, and when they were getting ready to rebuild a little later, one of the workmen made a discovery."

"It was no less than a lot of gold coin hidden away under some of the foundation stones, and it was easy enough to explain how it happened to be there."  
"You see, Mark's grandfather, in the time of the war, didn't have any faith in the government, and it was supposed then that he was hoarding up all the gold that he could get hold of. Some was found after he died, but it seemed that most of it, some \$8,000 in all, he'd hidden there under the mill."

"Squire Mace felt that it rightfully belonged to Mark, and of course it was quite a windfall. Instead of rinking it in business, for which he had no head, he spent most of it studying to be a doctor and he finally went west to practice, and has been successful. He was back here on a visit two or three years ago."  
"And hasn't your no-gossip rule been broken in all these years," asked Miss Eleanor.  
"Well, not very often. Once in a while, at the beginning, somebody would forget, but the offender was likely to be brought up with a round turn; and of late years the ladies got into the habit of discussing things that are going on in the world outside of Greenhill. They read a good deal and are pretty well informed. And I guess, Eleanor, it's when people have no interest in things that are worth while that they are most tempted to indulge in frivolous, unkind gossip."

"As your grandfather Watts used to say, when the brain is empty the tongue will wag."—F. E. C. Robbins in the Youth's Companion.

Whenever a Catholic begins to ask: "What has the Church ever done for me?" it is safe to assume that he has never done anything for the Church.

GENERAL INTENTION  
FOR MARCH

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED  
BY HIS HOLINESS PIUS X.

CHRISTIAN MORTIFICATION

The very word itself has a tendency to frighten ordinary folk. When any one talks to them about mortification, visions of rigorous fasting, hard couches, hair shirts, and disciplines reeking with the blood of penance, rise up before them, and they sink away persuaded that God does not ask those sort of sacrifices from them. Christian mortification was quite appropriate in former ages, they may tell you, but not nowadays; and, besides, what have they in common with the Fathers of the Desert?

Undoubtedly there are many saints on the calendar who received extraordinary graces from God, saints who mortified themselves with self-inflicted penances, and whom we are called upon to admire rather than imitate. But great graces were and always shall be free gifts of God. He distributes them where He will, to whom He will, and how He will, very often independently of the merit of the receivers, and unless He will, no one may not presume to look for them.

And yet because ordinary people do not receive those favors which would enable them to produce the Passion of Christ in their members as they did the saints, it does not follow that mortification is not necessary or that it should have no place in their lives. The words of Scripture, telling us that the life of man is a warfare were not addressed to any exclusive class but to all Christians alike. This warfare presupposes the existence of enemies against whom all must struggle. What is this struggle but the practice of mortification under some form or other?

The fact that we are all sinners, actual or potential, leaves us no avenue of escape from the duty of mortifying ourselves. Some of us have to atone for sins committed in the past; others to fortify ourselves against committing sins in the future. In the former case, mortification is merely penance; in the latter, the practice is necessarily temperance and self-control, precautionary measures that must be used to strengthen our souls against the greatest of evils.

In any event, without mortification of some kind, the prospect for the sinner is not cheering. With a multitude of hideous sins before him awaiting atonement in some form or other, man must admit that his own heart may be his bitterest enemy! Instead of helping him upward to heaven it often drags him down into the mire of sin where he lingers, wallowing often times for years. What a dreadful outlook! He has to atone for those years of sinfulness before he can see the face of God. He has a debt to pay either in this world or in the next. How much easier it would be to undertake the task here! This can be done by penance; and one does not need to think that he is doing great things, or that he is rivaling the Fathers of the Desert, if he fasts, or mortifies himself, or does something else abhorrent to nature, to acquit himself of his awful debt to God.

But there is not merely the past; there is also the future to look to. The experience of the past shows us how weak we are. We have to work out our salvation in fear and trembling, while our enemies are still active, perhaps more daring owing to their experience of our pusillanimity in the past. We must therefore strengthen our souls against their assaults. This is done by crushing our passions, our inclinations, our tendencies of character, thereby securing control over ourselves, a precautionary measure, if you will, but mortification in the true sense. Experience tells us that there is a perpetual struggle going on between the spirit and the body, and that mortification of the flesh is the great means of preventing rebellion against God's laws. Again, by denying ourselves the lawful pleasures of sense we are able to turn with greater freedom and earnestness to the practice of virtue; for instance, mortification by fasting is one of the wings of prayer.

Mortification, therefore, and struggle are among the laws that govern our spiritual lives, and in the present economy are apparently essential to salvation. Unless sinners pay the debt they owe to God by punishing themselves, and unless they overcome themselves, what hope can they have of reaching heaven? It is an act of mortification not merely to atone for sin but even to avoid the occasions of sin; and yet we know this must be done. We may not have the courage to roll in a thicket of thorns like St. Bernard, but we must deny ourselves the pleasures of sinning; we may not have the courage to deliver ourselves up to undergo imprisonment, in order to atone for an injustice to our neighbor, but we must give back our ill-gotten gains; we may not have the grace to inflict great penances on ourselves, but we must at least excite ourselves to sorrow for our sins. While mortification is practically essential for the justification of those who lead criminal lives, it is not less salutary for those—and happily they are numerous—who are walking surely but slowly up the narrow path. It may be that they are not given to sensuality, but there are other sources of sin, pride and self-love for instance, that are dangerous, and against which they must be continually on their guard. Merely to illustrate the need of mortification in quarters where it is supposed not to



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be needed, let us see some of the effects of pride. This vice is not restricted to those who openly flaunt their impiety and sinfulness; it lurks even in the heart of the devout. Self-complacency and vanity are lauders of pride. They are pride's perilous and dangerous offspring which may do serious harm to a soul striving for higher things. How many pious people there are who admit the formidable character of vanity who lament that they are subject to its attacks, yet through immortification continued to yield to it. Speculatively, we admire the good we should do, and we hate the evil we should not do, but in practice vanity allows us only half-heartedly to do the one and avoid the other. Our excessive self-absorption lays claim to what is not its own and appropriates that which is due to God. What a fertile field for mortification is the heart of a vain Catholic!

Another daughter of pride and self-love is over-scepticism. There are people whose criticism and reserve proof affect beyond measure. To be blamed in any way, is a real catastrophe to them. When one is not satisfied with them or with something they have done, all their happiness evaporates; their other difficulties are forgotten, and they are absorbed by the distress which this disapproval causes them. Often a simple word, a friendly warning, a wise bit of advice, offered with the best intentions, is sufficient to wound them. Nay, a still smaller trifle will sometimes suffice, some slight want of attention, some trifling neglect, a mark of indifference. What does this state reveal in a person, otherwise pious, but a great lack of mortification? And yet what a change there would be if those who are so sensitive where their own dignity is concerned, would show themselves as delicate of perception in their dealings with God. Their absurd pride, revealed in their vanity and susceptibilities, is an injury done to the divine honor, not merely because it is a source of discord between their theory and practice but also because it is contrary to humility and justice and truth.

We give only one instance of the effect of the lack of mortification and self-control in pious people; there are many other points that might be developed if applications were not easy and evident. Suffice it to know, then, that mortification has a wide field, not only in the hearts of those who have strayed far from God and who need to return to Him, but also in the hearts of those who, while cultivating virtue, do not go far enough. It is not enough to crush the prompt-

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ings of sensuality, pride also must be attacked in its various developments. It matters little whether or no we whiten the outside of the sepulchre; if there is only corruption within; it matters little whether we are exteriorly composed if we are seething with pride and vanity and self-complacency within; it matters little in the end how eloquent we are in proclaiming our virtues before men if God alone can scrutinize the innermost circles of our hearts, and it is by His laws and His reckoning that we shall be judged.

How necessary, therefore, is mortification for everybody. Under the form of penance it is necessary for the prodigal returning to his father's home; under the form of temperance and self-control, it is necessary for the one who has not strayed away, but who must be ever on his guard lest he, too, should become a prodigal. The fallen one has need of grace which accompanies penance to wash out the past with his tears; but the other, still standing, must prop himself up lest he fall. This is the road to solid virtue. "Without mortification," says St. John Chrysostom, "there is no virtue possible, because the flesh is always prone to sin. But the more the flesh is tamed by sufferings, voluntary or otherwise, the more the spirit is strengthened interiorly by grace."

And what is to be the final result of these generous efforts? In the first place, by mortification we do penance for our past sins and supplement what may be wanting to the reception of the sacraments; besides, mortification helps to remit the temporal debt due to sin. In the second place, mortification helps to stifle our evil inclinations and passions. The saints, in order to be sure that they did nothing that was forbidden, curtailed what was allowed. In this

way mortification kept them from many occasions of sin. It will do the same kind office for us if we practice it, meanwhile strengthening us against the enemies we have to deal with from within and without. Finally, mortification obtains for us the grace of God, without which we can do nothing. God is never deaf to our prayers, but when these prayers are accompanied by salutary acts, He listens to us more unreservedly, and answers us more liberally.

Let us during this holy time of Lent take to heart the lessons inculcated by the intention for the present month. Let us attach ourselves with all our heart, and perseveringly, to the holy work of mortification, as it is understood by the Catholic Church and recommended to us by her. Thereby we shall sanctify all the sorrows and crosses of this life and increase our merit in the next. We can have no better pledge for a blessed eternity.

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

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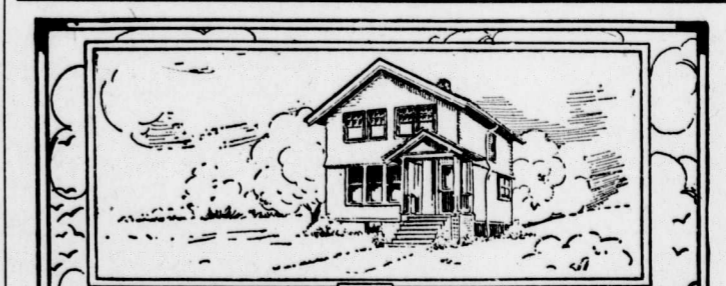
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