

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. F. HIGGINS, O. S. B.
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH IS ONE

"There shall be one fold and one Shepherd." (John x. 16)
The Church that our Blessed Lord came to found on earth, to be of use to the souls of men, must possess such features or marks that men can recognize it. And as there are so many various religions it is all the more imperative that these marks should easily be noted, and found only in one Church, the original one that Christ founded.

These marks, as you know, are four. The Church is one, is holy, is Catholic and Apostolic. We are bound to know and understand these things, and the knowledge of them braces us up to the practice of our holy religion.

The Unity or oneness of the Church to take the first characteristic to day, must be a real, visible, and perpetual unity.

The world, and many religions likewise, talks of broad-mindedness, comprehensiveness, that every man should be free to pick and choose, and take or leave what he likes, as to spiritual doctrines and the service of God. But the Church of Christ insists on real unity in Faith, in Government, in Worship.

In Faith there must be the same Creeds—the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian. And each must be believed in the same manner, explained completely and definitely in the same meaning. Test the unity of belief of any sect or church you wish, with some subject as the communion of saints, or the forgiveness of sins, phrases they gladly use. Test their unity of belief? There would arise such a storm of controversy, and a thousand and one opinions, that it would make us realize, in comparison, what is Catholic Unity. About "forgiveness of sins," for example, there is not one divergent thought in the minds of a hundred thousand good Catholics.

In Government, too, there must be real unity. All the figures of the Church, a kingdom, an army, a city, a fold, imply a government, a ruler, a leader, a shepherd. Why are there ministers in any church except to teach and preserve unity? Otherwise each minister would be a revolutionist, raising the flag of rebellion and leading the people his own way. And if there are ministers to preserve order and unity, why not bishops or overseers, as the name signifies, to watch over the ministers; and if bishops, why not one chief Bishop, the Pope, the Father of the faithful, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, to be in supreme charge of the Government? A ship must have a captain whom all obey, an army a general, a government a premier. Is the Church of Christ, then, alone, to be left without a head, a ruler, one whom all must acknowledge and obey?

Real Unity in Faith, in Government, and in Worship. By worship let us understand the outward and solemn service of God. The guardians of this unity are the ritual, the ceremonies, the rubrics or regulations, yes, the very language in which the Sacraments are administered and the Mass said. Latin is used, a dead language, which means not a spoken, commonly used language, varying in different centuries, which in the course of time might alter so much that changes and errors could creep in, perhaps unperceived.

And this real unity must, secondly, be visible. A mark by which a thing is known must be visible, or how could the thing be recognized? This seems so self-evident that one can scarcely believe that it has been an argument for ages that the Church of Christ existed in its purity so long—that length of time is very much debated—and then it became submerged, and appeared again in radiance at the Reformation! And what became of the souls of men during those centuries in which the Church was lost to view, whether it was wandering in the desert like the Israelites, or pursuing its course as a subterranean river? To do its work—that is to save souls—the Church must always be visible to the souls that seek her in earnestness and truth. That was the object of its Divine Founder; it had to be the light of the world, and no varying or uncertain light, to enlighten the souls of men. And if men say that its light was quenched, that it could not be discerned, are they not blaspheming that Almighty, Who could create the sun in the heavens, and the moon, the faithful witness, and yet failed, as they say, when He created His Church?

The Unity of the Church had to be a real, visible, and perpetual Unity. How could it be one if it were not always the selfsame one? So the perpetual unity of the Church precludes and makes impossible a fall, a lapse, a vital error in that Church. A repentant Church, a reformed Church has not had perpetual unity. No, the Church of Christ, as it was founded, so it has gone and will go on unto the end, really the same Church, visibly the same Church, perpetually the same Church.

And we have had the blessed faith given to us to belong to this Church of Jesus Christ. We can do honour to our Divine Mother by being zealous subjects of the Church. By being men who take a pride in knowing their duties and standing firmly by them—men who know their faith and can give an account of it, men

who obey and honor the government of their Church and make others notice and reverence it. By being men, again, who love their holy worship, to whom every detail, ceremony and word is something sacred. Blessed are such men, they are the servants of the Most High! To them He has committed the honor of His Church. By their good lives they make it visible as the one true Church of Christ. And generations of such men, handing the faith down from father to son, as the one treasure they possess, each in their day, make the unity of God's Church perpetual.

What a picture! Good Catholics, kneeling in many a Church to day, attending Mass, saying their Rosary, are linked, by their faith and hope and love, to relatives and friends long gone before them. We, their children's children, are working now for that glorious crown, which our forefathers have long ago received for fidelity to the one true Church.

PRAYER

Far more numerous than those who experience real difficulty in being able to pray at all, are those who find it difficult to pray without being distracted. Being distracted means the turning of our mind, when we are praying, from prayer to other things, not connected with it. There is a difference between distraction and a deliberate interruption of prayer made for some reasonable cause. A person who is talking to someone who is not talking to him, is not obliged to interrupt his conversation, and, with an apology, attend to some matter which suddenly intervenes. Neither must I fear that God will be displeased if, while speaking to Him, some pressing act of duty or charity claims my attention. The law which demands that I shall let my mind and my heart to God does not stipulate any length of time during which this praying must be consecutively continued, and where there is no law to check my liberty, there can be no sin.

ARE DISTRACTIONS SINFUL?

When, then, am I guilty of sin, in consequence of being distracted in my prayers? Only, we are taught, when I notice that my mind is not on my prayers, and, after noticing this wandering of thought, I freely indulge in allowing the interference, or, at the time of prayer, knowingly do what is certain to cause my mind to be distracted. Such a sin, considered by theologians as being ordinarily only slight, would of course become more serious were the subject of my distraction in itself sinful; if, for example, while purporting to pray, I indulge my eyes, or engage my thoughts in the contemplation of something that is a violation of the virtue of purity. There is consolation for all of us in the reflection that the Saints themselves were frequently annoyed by the same difficulty. If we resemble the Saints in this respect, however, we should further imitate them in adopting the same measures which they found successful: persevering earnestly in striving to overcome distractions, and not giving up our prayers, much as our enemy may endeavor to have us. Our Blessed Lord Himself has left us an example in this regard: the gospel tells us that "being in agony, He prayed the longer."

PRAYERS IN COMMON

Too much stress cannot be laid on the advantages accruing to those who habitually or frequently join together in common prayer. To spend a half hour in private morning prayer at home is indeed commendable; but to spend that same space of time in hearing Mass, if one can do so without neglect of duty, is certainly more commendable and invariably more fruitful. In every well ordered Christian household evening prayers are neglected by none of its members; if these individuals could be induced to assemble together, and, following an honored custom, make their evening offering to God in common, not only would the habit of prayer be better fostered, and its end more readily realized, but the special commendation of our Lord would be merited, for He has assured us: "Where there are two or three gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them."

TO WHOM MAY WE PRAY?

While we can pray God alone as the principal author and dispenser of all good things, so much so that it would be idolatry to pray in the same sense to any of lesser creature, nevertheless, as our patrons, and as our intercessors before the Most High we can and should call upon the angels and the saints. No precept imposes this intercession upon us, yet who could be so indifferent to the matter of his own salvation as to neglect, for instance, to invoke the Queen of all Saints, the Blessed Mother of God? The Church has never discouraged the practice of having recourse in prayer to the souls in purgatory, who, while they are temporarily detained in punishment, are nevertheless in the state of grace, and enjoying the friendship of God, can intercede for us. Nor is there sought to prevent our turning for help to those baptized infants who have been called from this life while in a state of innocence. Parents who mourn the loss of such little ones are to be consoled in the reflection that, instead of praying for them, they may pray to them, since no stain of guilt has separated them from the company of the elect.

AND FOR WHOM?

It is not only our privilege, but our duty as well, to pray for all

those who can be helped by prayer, and whom, by the precept of charity, we are called upon to cherish. First of all, of course, this obligation and privilege respects ourselves, toward whom our charity is first to be evidenced. Our neighbor, sinful though he be, and inimical to us, should have a share in our prayers; as we have seen in treating of the virtue of charity, it would be wrong for us to positively exclude anyone from the benefits of our prayers. This charity impels us to pray for the faithful departed in general, and for those in particular in purgatory who may be joined to us by peculiar ties; piety and gratitude towards our parents, ought, it would seem, to merit for them every possible spiritual help toward reaching heaven, and move us to apply our prayers to them. If they be already in possession of eternal bliss, our prayers will still not be wasted.

PRAYERS OF PETITION

One form of prayer, which our Blessed Redeemer urges us to offer, and, indeed, chides us for not offering more frequently, is that in which we beg those favors, both spiritual and material, of which we stand in need. Since we are incapable of knowing what would, or would not be for our own benefit, however, it behooves us always to ask our fathers on high for that which they are pleased to give. Who always has our best interests at heart. Experience itself teaches us that we often desire things which, as later developments prove, would be harmful, rather than an advantage to us. Consequently our petitions, however pressing they may seem to be, should be offered with the prayer of Christ to His Heavenly Father: "Not my will, but Thine, O Lord, be done!" Incidentally, it would be sinful for us to petition God for anything morally wrong, such as success in committing crime, etc. To do this would be equivalent to making God help in, or the author of something evil, and would be a grave irreverence to His infinite sanctity.

INFALLIBLE EFFICACY

We have His own assurance that if one prays in the name of Jesus, his prayer is bound to have an infallible effect. "Whatever you shall ask the Father in My Name, that I will do," are Our Lord's specific words. To pray in the name of Jesus means to pray in union with Jesus, and that our petitions are in this union, four conditions are required. We must have in view in our prayer, what Christ Himself had in view, namely, our eternal salvation. We must have faith in Christ's merits, putting aside all diffidence, and hesitation, and we must persevere in our prayer. It is evident, moreover, that he prays in greatest union with Christ who is in the state of grace, not as though God's favors are not at the disposal of sinners, but because the friendship with God which exists in consequence of freedom from sin contributes greatly to increasing the efficacy of prayer.—Catholic Transcript.

MOTHERHOOD

A modern writer states that it is no exaggeration to say that the good mothers of this generation are building the homes of the next generation, and the bad mothers are building the prisons. These words sum up neatly the ultimate results of home training as directed by the mother. Exceptions on both sides of the rule but prove its general truth. Outside of religion itself, there is no other influence in the world so holy, so strong and so effective as that of a good mother. The father may claim headship in the household, but the mother is the heart of the family. The family unit measures every pulsation from that heart, and is strengthened or weakened according to the vigor of the heart. Each member of that small group feels the responsive throbbing of every heart beat. The will of the father may be executed through fear; love alone is the response to the mother's desires.

Nature has so ordained things that the young of practically all living species cling to the mother during the period of weakness. Man, endowed with rational powers, attributes to the mother not only his physical being, but also all those latent influences for good that arise in his heart when confronted by temptation. As the soldier boy leaves for the field of danger, the mother's parting admonition, "My son, remember your mother," exerts more power for good than all the laws and regulations of the State. The law appeals to him as a citizen; the mother speaks to him with the command of love as to a part of her very self.

This influence of the mother tends every day in the privacy of the home to mould the character of our future men and women. As a woman she is not faultless: as a mother she represents to her children the very apex of perfection. Her duty then is to live up to the high standard of this ideal model, and to treat her children with tenderness, firmness, and a becoming womanly dignity. Let her remember that her every word and action are so many stones in the structure of filial worship which she is erecting in the heart of these children. Let there be no stones marred by flaw or defect. Even as now she holds in her arms the offspring of her love, so in after years will the stalwart arm of son or the tender embrace of daughter encircle her shrinking form, and pillow her

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This is the day of the mother. All honor and glory be hers. The unfortunate creature who has willfully deprived herself of the glory of motherhood may now hang her miserable head in abject shame. God has not blessed all married persons with these proofs of His love; but they who have voluntarily refused this evidence of divine favor now stand forth as objects of scorn before God and man.—St. Paul Bulletin.

THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY

URGES LOYALTY TO COUNTRY

DIGNIFIED PATRIOTIC EXPRESSIONS

From Truth

"Down through the course of the ages the Catholic Church has ever insisted on three things: on the fidelity to God, loyalty to country, charity to all."—Bishop Hartley.

We of the last born nation who came into the conflict without hatred are able to put our treasures and blood forward for the cause of liberty and declare that it is not for gold, treasure or land, but for truth, mercy, love, and that men on this earth may be free."—Archbishop Hanna.

"We have been exhorting our every effort and will continue to do so to persuade all Americans that they can do the greatest good to themselves and their country by a cheerful and generous performance of their duty as it is pointed out to them by lawfully constituted authorities."—Cardinal Gibbons.

"Our young men are about to risk all that man naturally holds most precious in vindicating our rights and the rights of humanity. Life and loved ones are dear to them, but at the call of duty all fond ties are severed; the fire of loyalty and patriotism glows in their breasts and another every other less noble flame. They have seen their country's need and they have offered in its defense their lives, their goods, and their sacred honor."—Bishop Schuler.

"We must support the government in all possible respects. I will ask every priest under forty to volunteer as chaplain."—Archbishop Prendergast.

"Akin to religion, a very vital part of religion, is patriotism—love of country, obedience to its commands, warm interest in its welfare. The powers of the government of a nation are, as Holy Writ teaches, from God Himself, and to obey His ordinances is to obey God Himself. The hour has come for the Christian people of America to give evidence of the divine faith that is within them by giving evidence of the patriotism that is theirs."—Archbishop Ireland.

"The government needs and expects your support at this time, and you should give it willingly and gladly. The young men of the country, by the thousands, are going into service to defend our cause with their very lives, if necessary, and the least those of us who do not go can do is to support them by liberal subscriptions of our money."—Bishop Glass.

"The hour is fraught with grave possibilities, the die is cast, the fate of the country rests upon the loyalty of its citizens."—Bishop Milan.

"The times are extraordinary and call for extraordinary methods. Our soldiers and sailors will need every-

thing we can do for them, and it would be a crime for any of us to be indifferent to the tremendous consequences—which would result in this country in the unthinkable event of our failure to do our full duty at this critical time."—Cardinal O'Connell.

WAR GARDENS

The war garden is a necessity today. The idea should be encouraged. Both adults and children should seriously reflect whether it is not better to raise vegetables for home consumption and conserve those articles of food that can be transported overseas for the soldiers than to adopt the policy of ease that in these times means ultimate hardship and suffering on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the olden days the family garden was a commonplace. The produce saved the family resources. Later there was a tendency to go to market daily and purchase what was needed. The stringency of war has sobered the world. The rejected ideas of yesterday are to day held in honor. And the war garden has come into its own again.

Not only is it of advantage to the family resources that such gardens be planted, but it is of immense value to the Government and to our soldiers. It is clear that with the ranks of working men largely thinned by the call of the young men of the country to arms, there must be a decrease of cultivation of the soil with a corresponding decrease in supply. On the whole, however, the harassing situation faces us of a greater demand for food stuffs to supply not only those at home, but the greater expeditionary forces abroad. Added to this is the necessity of supplying food in immense quantities for the Allies whose armies look to America for sustenance.

Hence, the utter need of all doing their bit in the way of home planting is evident. These perishable goods will be consumed here, and those that were ordinarily consumed at home in peace times will be released to Europe.

But there is a further consideration. The high cost of living may be cut down by home gardening. The fewer producers, the higher the prices. When all plant there will be a sufficiency with no demands that cannot be met by an adequate supply. This will naturally have the effect of depressing the high scale of family expenditures that have of recent years become a burden. This movement has decided advantages. It calls for but little labor. In its effects, however, it is most significant, not only for the family, but for the soldier and for the nation.—The Pilot.

CRITICIZING OTHERS

It is a great pity that we are all so ready to criticize. We are always on the alert to discover the faults and failings of others and to pass judg-

ment. A man's reputation stands as long as he does what is right, but once a shadow falls across it, all his former good deeds are obscured by its darkness. We are continually railing against the faults of others, and yet we do the same things ourselves and expect them to go unnoticed. Why not place a charitable interpretation upon them and make it a rule to excuse as much as we can?—The Tablet.

High birth is a poor dish on the table.

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