

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. P. HICKEY, O. S. B. FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE EVIL OF MORTAL SIN

Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil.—(Rom. ii. 9)

Fear, my dear brethren, is the pain arising from the apprehension of evil, threatening and destructive.

But we are not always wise in fearing just what we should. Not seeing and appreciating thoroughly what really is evil, we fall into the mistake of fearing things that are harmless, and not fearing those that are dangerous.

Our Blessed Lord teaches us, "Blessed are the poor," and suffering He chose for Himself and His Blessed Mother. But there was one thing that He did fear, one thing that wrung from Him a bloody sweat, that nailed Him to the cross, that broke His adorable, loving Heart, and that was mortal sin.

That is the one evil that we must learn to fear and try to avoid. We have often shut our eyes to the deadliness of sin. Our nature leads us to commit it; it is so hard to be ever resisting, so easy to fall, that we are disinclined to acknowledge that sin is really the only evil to be feared.

With the light of God's grace, let us look into mortal sin. Let us see what it is, what it entails, and how it enthralls us. We need not fear all evils. But those that are near, threatening, destructive, secret, and hidden—those are the ones from which we draw back appalled.

Test it thus, and see how mortal sin is to be dreaded. It is near. Your own bad desires and passions, the wickedness of the world around you, make you feel that you are hemmed in by sin and the danger of it. Near? Why, in your thoughts, on your lips, in your heart, a mortal sin may be lurking.

Not only near, but threatening. Falling into sin is not chance work. You have an enemy, clever, cunning, who is always trying to make you fall into sin, or having fallen, to keep you in it. Such is the devil's implacable hatred that it is war to the death.

And the danger is the greater because it is partially hidden and concealed. Partially hidden even from the devout and watchful, wholly concealed from the careless, the thoughtless, and the dissipated. What is hidden? Its malice against God. Temptation is so pleasant and plausible, but do not trust to that. See how God hates sin, how He punishes it, and how sin punished our Lord when He took upon Himself the iniquities of us all; then you will realize with horror the malice of mortal sin.

What is hidden? Its power of enthralling the poor soul. Habits of sin are formed, the soul is darkened, the will loses its strength; of themselves sinners are helpless.

What is hidden? The miseries that mortal sin entails. The devil is not loyal to those who follow him and give themselves to him. Promises at first and enticements; and when they are securely in his power, remorse, despair, the fear of hell haunting them. Even in this life, as far as we can help ourselves, these miseries cannot be remedied. We cannot even ask for mercy from the offended God, unless the good God gives us the grace. There are many so contented in their sins, so blinded, so besotted, that they never even ask God for pardon. Pray "that none of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. iii. 13.) Unless the infinite goodness of God intervenes, such people are already victims devoted to the fire of hell, reserved under darkness in everlasting chains unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude i. 6.)

But if death finds us in mortal sin, the evil is altogether irremediable: we are beyond redemption then.

But let us bless Almighty God that this evil of mortal sin, which is so near, so destructive, so malicious, is not altogether unavoidable. If there were no gleam of light on this dark picture, our fear would become despair; for we cannot fear unless hope tells us that we may avoid the evil.

Yes, it is to holy fear and prayer that we must look to be delivered from the hands of our enemy. Fear the evil of sin. As the Scripture says, "Flee from it; pass not by it; go aside, and forsake it." (Prov. ix. 15.) If you make light of the evil, if you trust to your own goodness or cleverness, you are lost. The wise man warns us: "My son, hast thou sinned? Do so no more; but for thy former sins also pray that they may be forgiven thee. Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent; for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee. The teeth thereof are the teeth of a lion, killing the souls of men." (Ecclesi. xxi. 1, 3.)

Keep from the evil and pray. Pray that you may have a good will to cling to God, to obey God, to try to please God. All depends on that good will. The devil is powerless unless your will consents. Without consent there is no sin, no evil, but only temptation. Fear and prayer will keep your will safe, adhering to God.

We see, then, what mortal sin is. The one evil that we need fear and avoid. Who can hesitate to resolve to do this, when he remembers its malice and its terrors? It is a great work—the work of our lifetime; a

work in which we are sustained and helped by the grace of God; a work for which God is faithful to reward us.

TEMPERANCE

LITTLE BENNY

"Why don't father come home, mother dear? It's so lonesome here without him, and poor little Benny is so sick. I don't see why he stays away so long." The speaker was a fair, curly-haired boy of six, whose sunken blue eyes and pale, emaciated cheeks told a story of misery and want.

He had his head on his mother's breast and continued talking in his sweet, boyish accents:

"I wonder why father don't stay at home like he used to long ago. He used to help me, mother, and what fun we had playing. Now he comes home so late, and acts so queer, and is so cross that I am almost afraid of him sometimes. I think poor father must be sick." For a few moments the boy was silent, and then said:

"Mother, what makes you so sad? I saw you cry once, and you hugged me when you thought I was asleep. A big tear dropped on my face. I wish you were not so sad, because you make me feel so bad."

Poor mother, she had cause to be sad. For ten years she had been married, happy at first in her own little home, with her lovely boy, and best of all, a good husband. But a financial crash came, and they were forced to surrender their pretty little home. They moved into two rooms in a large tenement house. She thought the change would break her heart, but she hid her grief like a brave woman, and in order to help her husband she took in needle work.

Discouraged and disappointed with the outlook, the man finally began to drink, and from visiting places where liquor was sold he began to gamble. His tender love for his wife seemed changed to hate, and the loving husband became a demon and a slave to drink. His love for drink became so great that he spent every cent he earned and finally was discharged by a most patient employer.

The poor mother did not despair. She knew God's love and mercy was as boundless as the sea. She labored harder than ever, and prayed with her whole soul. She began a novena of First Fridays, and all her prayers and works were offered for the husband. This was the last Friday, and with a hopeful heart she had waited and prayed till night came, and as yet no husband.

Benny had fallen asleep; Jack aged four, was playing with some blocks, while Michael, the oldest, was looking out on the gloomy street. The mother put her hand on the shoulder of the oldest, and said: "Honey boy, mother is not sad, only tired. You know she has been working very hard to keep you all, but she will be strong again in a little while." Then as the tears sprang to her faded eyes, she added: "When you grow big and strong, you will help me, won't you dear?"

"Yes, dear mother, when brother and I grow up to be men we will go out every day and bring home lots of money, so that you can dress up nice as you used to, and go out with papa and us."

"I know you will be a good boy, bless your dear little heart," replied mother. "And now will you remain in the house and mind Jack and Benny while I go out and try to find father?"

"Yes, mother; but please do not be long, because it's so dark and lonely here," the little fellow answered.

"No, dear children, I will return as soon as possible; so goodbye for a little while," and she bent over and kissed each one. Then with a prayer on her lips she went out into the night to find her husband.

Up the damp, cold street she passed drawing her shawl closer about her as a gust of wind and rain slashed against her frail form. Shivering, she passed the gloomy figure of a policeman, who looked seriously after her. Bravely she continued on her way till she reached the glaring lights of a saloon. Here she paused for an instant, then, gathering fresh courage, she made her way through the swinging doors.

A few rows of looking men were lined up against a bar of clinking glasses and bottles and, noticing the woman, started as if their consciences had been pricked, perhaps at the thought of some venerable mother or faithful wife sitting up worrying and waiting for them at home. In a gruff voice the bartender demanded what she wanted. With all her womanly dignity she replied that she sought her husband. Not waiting for the man's answer, she boldly entered into the rear room. There she could distinguish among all others the once erect and manly form of her husband. He was drinking and gambling madly, and appeared much excited.

Quietly she walked up behind him, and gently laying her hand upon his shoulder, softly called his name. At her voice he turned and faced her with dark and lowering eyes. Then a change came over his face, a look of horror, as if he had seen a ghost. He tried to speak, but it was some seconds before he uttered: "You here! You in this place! Come away!"

He sprang up and, taking her by the hand, hurried out. He ran as if eager to get her away from such a place. Just as they were passing the Church of the Holy Name, the wife said:

"John, I'm faint; let us go in here."

With some of his old tenderness he helped her up the steps, and both entered the church. After resting a few minutes, she knelt and her husband beside her. The tears rolled over her face as she said over and over again:

"Dear Sacred Heart of Jesus, I thank you! I thank you for bringing my husband back to me!"

The husband was praying also, asking forgiveness and grace to keep the good resolutions he had made before the altar.

They did not remain long in the church, for the mother remembered that the children were alone. When they came out the husband said: "What a place I brought you to! What a wretch I have been! Can you ever, ever forgive me? I can never forgive myself!"

When they arrived at the poor tenement they both looked in the window. And what a picture they saw—the three children on their knees praying for their father. Then they began to sing a hymn to the Sacred Heart, one that their father had taught them. Who can picture the joy of the children as their father and mother entered?

It was many years later when the sun, slowly sinking behind the fair, green hills, seemed to throw loving rays on the porch of a pretty little cottage on which sat a man and his wife. A little golden-haired girl was singing happily among the flowers in the garden. The gate opened and two young men entered. One of them, seeing the little girl, lifted her high in the air, while the other said:

"She always wears her medal of the Sacred Heart. We must see that Penny teaches her that new hymn to the Sacred Heart."—Denis Horgan, in Sunday Companion.

THE FOUNDING OF THE PAPACY

By the word "papacy" is understood the power exercised by the Pope of Rome as the visible head of the Church. That this authority was vested in Peter, as the first of the Apostles, and was handed down by him to his successor, Linus, and by Linus to Anacletus, and by Anacletus to his two hundred and fifty seven successors, until it now rests in Benedict XV, gloriously reigning, is what is meant by "papacy."

Experience proves that the founders of all human institutions, the most insignificant as well as the greatest, have always endeavored to give a lasting character to their work by establishing some order of procedure in their organization. History proves that the conquerors of nations organized governments to secure their stability. Even the heads of modern sects have each sought to establish some semblance of authority through which they might protect their favorite tenets. The founders of our republic were not satisfied with merely working out their independence, and proclaiming to the world the great doctrine of the political equality of man, but they cemented the several commonwealths into a united government, and formulated a constitution under which the nation might be governed under one chosen head.

Can we believe that Christ did less? Must we suppose that the Son of God, the Eternal Wisdom, Who came down to earth to preach the truths necessary for the salvation of all men throughout all time, was, after a few short years, to be taken away, leaving behind nothing but confusion and dissension? Did He not leave after Him a doctrine that was to be perpetuated under the guidance of His chosen leaders with some visible head? Are we to believe that His life ended in the tragedy on Calvary, only to be followed by a farce in the world? If Christ established no organization for the purpose of perpetuating His doctrine, or appointed no teachers to inculcate it, or chose no head to govern it, how has His message been handed down to the world for nearly two thousand years? Many will say the Bible, forgetting that the New Testament is the product of the very organization which Christ established.

Christ was God. He left no Himself without testimony. Through His chosen representatives His doctrines and revelations have been handed down according as they have delivered them to us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." He gathered around Himself the twelve Apostles, Peter and Andrew, Philip and John and James, and the rest of them whom He designated at one time publicly (see Luke vi. 14-16) in like manner He designated Peter as the chief of the Apostles and placed in him the primacy. The proof that Christ constituted St. Peter as the head of His Church is found in the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter xvi, verses 17 to 19; St. John, chapter xxi, verses 15 to 17. In the Gospel of St. Matthew the office is solemnly promised to the Apostle Peter. In response to his profession of faith in the divine nature of his Master, Christ thus addressed him: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth,

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it shall be loosed also in heaven." The prerogatives when promised were evidently personal to Peter. It is clear from the words of Christ that Peter's profession of faith was not made in the name of the other Apostles, but in his own alone. Therefore it was that Christ pronounced on Peter, distinguishing him by his name, Simon, son of John, a peculiar and personal blessing, declaring that his knowledge regarding the divine Sonship sprang from a special revelation granted to him by Almighty God. Christ went further and recompensed this personal confession of His Divinity by bestowing upon Peter a personal reward: "Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My Church."

In these words Christ plainly taught that His Church was to be the congregation of those who acknowledge Him and His organization built on Peter. The early doctors taught that Peter is to the Church of Christ what the foundation is to a house. Moreover he must be the principle of unity, of stability and of growth. Peter is the principle of unity, since what is not joined to the foundation is no part of the Church; of stability, since it is the firmness of the foundation by which the Church remains unshaken; of growth, since as the Church increases it can only be because the new stones are built upon the old foundation.

The only manner in which an individual can govern any corporate body is by possessing authority over it. The supreme head of any organization, in subjection to whom all subordinate authorities hold their power, is the only one of a society in whom it may be said that the principle of unity, stability and growth resides. No one questions the power of Christ over the Church that He founded; and who will say that it is not within His province to assign to Peter a prerogative which is His Own, thereby associating Peter with Himself in an altogether singular manner.

In the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew, verse 19, Christ promised to bestow upon Peter the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. Were not Christ's own words, therefore, a promise that He will confer on Peter the supreme authority necessary to govern the Church? In all countries, even to this day, the key is the symbol of authority. Peter is delegated to rule in His place, to be His vice-regent. Christ even indicated the character and extent of the power bestowed upon Peter. It is a power to "bind" and to "loose," which words denote the granting of legislative and judicial authority.

The promise made by Christ to Peter received its fulfillment after the resurrection in the scene described in the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel of St. John. Here Christ, when about to ascend to heaven, placed His whole flock, both the sheep and the lambs, in charge of the Apostle. This portion of the Gospel of St. John stands in striking parallel with the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew. In St. Matthew's Gospel we find the reward was given to Peter after a profession of faith which singled him out from the other eleven Apostles, while in the Gospel of St. John Christ solicits a similar protestation of a higher virtue: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" In St. Matthew Christ promises to make Peter the foundation stone of the house of God. In St. John He makes him the shepherd of God's flock to take the place of Himself, the Good Shepherd. St. Chrysostom, in commenting on the passage of St. John, "feed my sheep," asks the question: "Why does Christ pass over the others and speak of the sheep to Peter?" The great doctor goes on to say that it was because Peter was chosen as the first of the Apostles, the mouthpiece of the Disciples, the head of the followers of Christ.

The position of St. Peter after the ascension, as shown in the Acts of the Apostles, demonstrates that Christ had chosen him as the leader of His followers. From the very beginning he is the chief of the apostolic men; and we know that even St. Paul consulted with him rather than with the others. Christ gave to His Church a leader who might conserve her strength against her foes, so that the gates of hell should not prevail against her. The contest with the powers of evil

did not belong to the apostolic age alone. It is and must be a permanent feature of the Church's life. Just as Christ placed in Peter's hands the primacy, or papacy, as it is called today, so throughout the centuries the office of Peter must be realized in Christ's Church in order that she may prevail in her everlasting struggle. An analysis of Christ's words in the Scripture proves conclusively that He instituted the papacy and that the office of the supreme head of the Church must be perpetuated.

Down through the nearly two thousand years of the Christian Era, two hundred and sixty popes of Rome, from Peter to Benedict XV, prove conclusively that Christ did not promise in vain when He said to Peter: "Upon this rock I will build My church."—Rev. W. D. O'Brien, in Extension Magazine.

SUCH FRUITS COULD GROW ONLY ON A GOOD TREE

"Marquette and his compeers travelled on snow-shoes when they did not go barefoot; they lived on moss when they could not luxuriously feast upon pounded maize; they lived in bark huts when fortunate enough to sleep indoors; and they died of labor and exposure when they were not murdered by the Indians. Their missions, therefore, existed without great revenues, and the most they asked of their friends at home was prayers for the souls they had come to save.

"Nor let us fail to conceive the phenomenal nobleness of these Frenchmen because they were heroes and martyrs in the name of a Church that may not be ours and which expresses itself in ways that we may not prefer. Whosoever Church it is and whosoever it is not, it is at least a great Church beyond compare; and it has in its history splendid epochs, when it commanded greater self-sacrifice and higher endeavor than Christianity has otherwise known since its first lofty days. One such epoch, raised distinctly above the level of the centuries, was the epoch of the French Jesuits in North America. They were the elect of a society which had a first claim upon the most fervent souls. The records of humanity will be sought in vain for the story of purer lives, of more steadfast apostleship, or of sterner martyrdoms. Jogues, Bressani, Daniel, Frebenf, Lallemant, Garnier, Marquette, living and dying, illustrated the loftiest virtue in the world. No praise is too extravagant, no language is too sacred to apply to them. They were a glorious company of apostles; they were a noble army of martyrs."—Franklin McVeagh.

If you scratch some saints you will find the devil.

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