

FIVE-MINUTE SERMON

TRINITY SUNDAY

THE DIVINE MAJESTY

"For of Him, and by Him, and in Him are all things: to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

To-day, my dear brethren, the Church, having completed the round of feasts and fasts which she began on Christmas, having brought to our remembrance our Lord's birth, His holy childhood, His ministry on earth, His Passion and death, His glorious resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Holy Ghost as He had promised, finally brings us into the presence of the Being by Whom all these wonderful works have been accomplished, and Who is the sole object of our adoration, the ever Blessed Trinity, the three Divine Persons, the one God. She bids us contemplate, so far as it is possible for us, the great and ineffable mystery into the faith of which we have been baptized, and to join with the angels and saints in the canticles of heaven. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was, and Who is, and Who is to come."

"Of Him, and by Him, and in Him are all things," says the apostle, reminding us of this highest of all the teachings of the Christian faith. Of the Father is the Son, and of the Son is the Holy Ghost, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and in Whom is their life and mutual love. The distinction of the Divine Persons is thus intimated to us; but the divine nature is only one; of, by, and in that One are we and all things created.

We and all the world around us are of God: not part of Him, nor born of Him according to nature, nor proceeding from His substance, but still of Him in that we owe our being entirely to Him, Who drew us from nothing by His Almighty power. Nothing could have existed outside of God Himself except through the wonderful, incomprehensible act of creation. From nothing, nothing of itself could come; all things are from and of God, Who created them from nothing.

By His Almighty power, then, we have been created, and by it now we are sustained. We could not live for a moment except by His continual support. It is only by His aid that we can draw a single breath, walk a single step, or perform the simplest act. The winds and the waters, and all the powers of nature, as we call them, and His powers, too, which He lends to us, and makes subservient to our use.

And in Him we live and move and are. He is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. It is not only that He makes us live; it is His life by which we live; our life comes from and belongs to His eternal life. This is the life of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in Himself; ours is in Him.

To Him, then, the one and only true God, "be glory," as the apostle says, "for ever and ever." How often we say these words, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," and how little do we think of what they mean! If all that we are and have is from God, by Him and in Him, how can we set ourselves apart from Him, or claim anything for ourselves against Him? How can we glory in ourselves, or desire glory from others, when all glory, praise, and honor belong to Him, and to Him from Whom, by Whom, and in Whom all things are?

For this is what it means when we say, "Glory be to God." Not some glory or praise or recognition of His greatness from us, as a sort of tax or tribute which we must pay to keep the rest for ourselves. No, when we have given glory to God as we should, there will be nothing left for us to keep. This is the perfection of the creature, to prostrate itself at the foot of its Creator's throne, and to cast all the crowns it has received before Him that slumbereth thereon.

On this Sunday of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body of Christ, the Church, as usual, wakes with the birds.

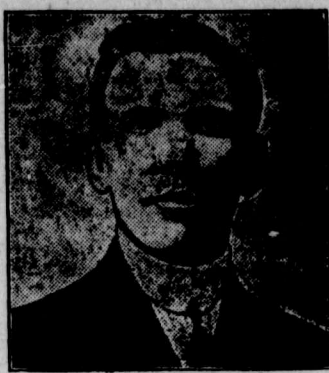
Everything is of a cheerful countenance. The sisters are all in new habits. Mère Placide is positively bashful in her fresh black and clean starched cowl. The *seours* converse about with shining faces. No work of a mental character is ever done on a Sunday, though to the lay mind the distinctions are sometimes difficult of comprehension. On this Sunday of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body of Christ, the Church, as usual, wakes with the birds.

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orders associated by the closest ties with Rome. In any case it is no hard matter for the most Protestant mind to pray for the peace and continuance of a home outside the moral shelter of which these good women would find it difficult indeed to place themselves, and the promise is gladly given.

The procession of the Saint Sacrament is to take place before the service of the *Salut* which is to be held in the garden and after Vespers have been sung in the chapel.

During the long bright morning—which would be so hot in the streets of Paris, but here it is so infinitely cool and shady—the last touches are being put to the improvised altar before the statue of the Virgin at the end of the principal aisle. The fine linen cloth with which it is covered is edged with priceless lace, one of the treasures of the convent. It must be owned that there is a touching simplicity in some of the adornments employed by the novices, notable among these being a variety of paper frills, obviously offered by the kitchen. But the whole effect is sweet and reverent, and there are flowers everywhere. This time, for the glory of God, Joseph is allowed to work his will on the rose bushes, and in the altar vases are tall white lilies with which the air is fragrant. The very garden seems to have put forth its best strength for the *Fête Dieu*. Sweet peas, shocks, lupines, make a brave show; all the old-fashioned country flowers flourish happily under Joseph's ministrations here in the heart of Paris.

At four o'clock all the doors and windows and shutters of *La Solitude* are carefully closed. It is difficult, in face of the great wall behind the elm trees, to imagine the possibility of marauders other than cats; but caution is one of the rules of life in a convent, and for the next hour or so this little corner will be entirely unprotected even by the faithful Joseph.

The chapel looks larger and lighter in the June sunshine than it did on those chilly March days when the philanthropic ladies met there. The light streams in through the clear glass windows on either side of the nave. Here also the air is heavy with the scent of lilies. Every available seat not occupied by the community is thronged with former pupils and their parents, for this is a great day in the neighborhood, and the sisters as well as the children love an opportunity of coming again to the convent. An old *Monsieur* deeply venerated by the sisters, has come to conduct the service, and the red of his vestments adds a touch of color to the sombre mass of black habits in the building. The possibility of marauders is being collected the banners and the pretty little girls in their white frocks and veils whom she has chosen to carry them.

The chapel of Notre Dame de Bon Secours has always been noted for its music. Here Gounod used to come Sunday after Sunday to worship with the sisters, and often to listen to his own compositions sung by the black-robed choir. Now the voices rise and fall in the unison commanded by Pius X., which the sisters themselves, with all respectful submission to the Holy Father, are inclined to think has a little interfered with the beauty of their music. But to some hearing it brings an admir-

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able effect of simple devotion, swept and garnished of any suggestion of the opera house or the concert room. There are some fine voices in the choir, and the sister presiding at the organ is a true musician. The Latin words of Bach's beautiful hymn "Oh Heart ever joyful" seem to rise in waves of true faith and joyousness from the very hearts of the singers, solemnly accentuated by intervals of silent prayer between the verses. The office closes with the petition to the Virgin to help those who are in trouble, and to intercede *pro devoto femine sexu*, which must have a peculiar significance in a French convent at the present day.

Slowly the Host, borne aloft under the gold and white canopy, passes through the kneeling congregation, who rise and follow in complete silence down the wide stone staircase and out into the sunlit garden. At the foot of the stairs the procession is joined by Mère Placide's little girls with their banners and baskets of roses, and to the chanting of the *Ave Verum* the whole moves under the flickering shade of the chestnut trees to the altar at the far end of the avenue. Here the *Salut* of the Saint Sacrament is sung to a congregation kneeling reverently on the gravel path, the sweet female voices rising on the still, warm air, the silver bells ringing when the Host is elevated, and the fumes of the incense mingling with, and for a time almost overpowering, the strong scent of the lilies.

Tantum ergo Sacramentum
Veneremur cernui.

The light falls softly on the black habits of the nuns or the bent heads of the people. The mere simplicity of the scene is impressive. Surely the expression of the Catholic faith is heard here in all its primitive sincerity.

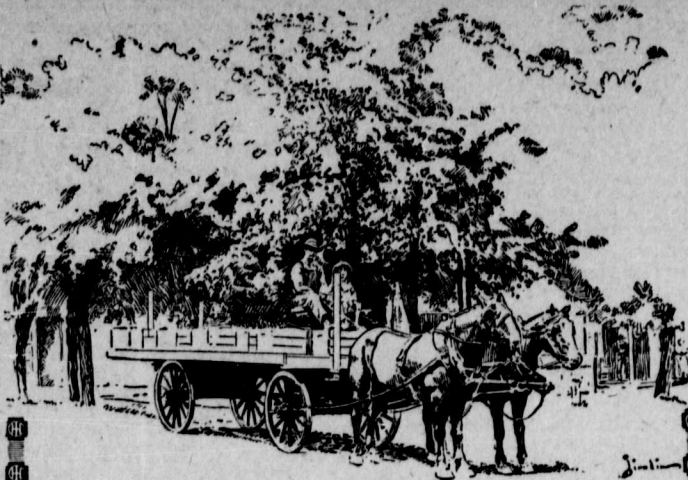
Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes: laudate eum, omnes populi.

The congregation rises to its feet with the triumphant burst of Gounod's music. A blackbird in the chestnut tree above the altar sings with all his might determined to make himself heard in this hymn of praise to the Creator of all. And why should he not? Certainly the good sisters would not wish to exclude him from their song of thanksgiving.

Slowly the procession forms again, and the people fall once more on their knees as the Host is borne past them beneath the rich canopy. Joseph's little children, mites in clean pinafores, stand up from amongst the stragglers in the rear and gaze wide-eyed at the acolytes and their swinging censers, until the parental hand forces them gently into a seemly attitude of devotion. One old grandfather, too old to kneel, leans heavily on his stick, the sun shining on his bare shaven head, and crosses himself devoutly with a shaking hand as the Saint Sacrament passes. To the on-lookers there is something of a beautiful anachronism in this medieval scene in the heart of twentieth-century Paris.

The little white-robed children, scattering their rose leaves, emblems of the Passion, in the path of the *Bon Dieu*, instinctively recall the angels of Bonagelli on the walls of the Perugian gallery, with their sweet tear-laden eyes, their wreathed heads, and their baskets of roses. But the eyes of these small Parisian maidens, solemn though they are for the moment, are free from tears, those of some of their elders. As the procession of the Saint Sacrament winds slowly away under the trees, the choir singing the *Ave Maria*, the bright patch of color made by the priestly vestments thrown up in strong relief against the mass of black habits and white coils of the nuns, more than one who follows it is *le cœur gros*. The pathos of the scene cannot fail to touch the least thoughtful of those present, and it has needed no promise to Mère Placide to inspire a prayer for the future safety and well being of the convent.

It is impossible not to wonder whether the June sun will shine upon such another procession within these walls again. In any case, for those who have



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been privileged to join in it, this afternoon's ceremony will be stored amongst life's most fragrant memories; and there are many who will never smell the scent of crushed rose-leaves, or see the golden light falling across a bed of tall white lilies, without thinking of the *Fête Dieu* in the Paris garden.

Mère Placide, coming into the dining-room of *La Solitude* an hour later, has little to say. Her heart is probably full of love and regret for her children, but, if her air of repose is to be trusted, of confidence, rather than of fear, in the future. Everybody is a little touched and subdued. Even the birds have ceased to sing, and a calm which is full of sweetness broods over the convent.

Presently, however, when the *dames pensionnaires* are sitting under the trees outside the little house, the tension is very sensibly relieved by the sounds of genuine play and merriment coming from the larger garden. "It is the novices," says one of the ladies, who knows the convent well: "they are still keeping their *fête*! It is not good manners to invade the gardens at this hour, but by peeping through the privet hedge it is impossible to see that it is indeed the novices, and they are playing a modified form of the *jeu de paume*. It is impossible not to see that they remain, the exercise has brought a flush to their cheeks and a brightness to their eyes. Shouts of

laughter and cherry expostulations rouse the echoes of the darkening *allées*. Here there is no lack of healthy animal spirits, a little bewildering perhaps to the minds of those to whom the convent walls suggest mere suppression. Certainly they are old, these novices, to be playing ball like young schoolgirls. But what would you? as the *Mère Economie* would say. Nature will out, and the good sisters like to see them happy. The game does not last long, however. The great clock strikes nine; Mère Placide comes slowly across the garden in the gathering dusk. Complete silence has already fallen upon the girls, who have grouped themselves with unconscious effect; a study in black and white against the grey statue of the Virgin where the altar stood a few short hours before. The evening hymn rises softly in the pure girlish voices. The watcher behind the privet hedge tries to catch the words, but little more than the refrain of each verse is audible:

Je vous remercie, Seigneur
Merci, merci, mon Dieu.

Surely the good God still walks in His garden in the cool of the evening, and may accept this simple hymn of thanksgiving for a happy holiday and for the gift of His sunshine on the blessed *fête* of the Saint Sacrament.—Rose M. Bradley in Nineteenth Century and After.

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