

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE CIRCUMCISION

He shall be called a Nazarene. (Matt. ii, 23) Three days' journey from Jerusalem, at the foot of a mountain, lies the little town of Nazareth, dear to every Christian heart. It was here that the archangel greeted Mary and the greatest miracle of Divine love was wrought, the miracle that we honor daily with the words of St. John: "The Word was made Flesh."

The little town, which was our Lord's dwelling place in His childhood, was immortalized by the fact that He was known by its name, and in a lesser degree we may say of it that it is still more true of the Cross. The Cross, the mark of the deepest shame, was sanctified by Jesus, and in the same way He made the name of Nazareth honorable and holy. All Galileans were despised by the Jews, but the inhabitants of Nazareth were considered more despicable than any others, and to call a man a Nazarene was an insult. Yet the early Christians often gave themselves this name, for it expressed to them the fact that our highest glory is to be found in the deepest humility. Jesus desired to be called a Nazarene, it was His will to be despised, and for our sake He descended into the lowest depths of humiliation but while He seems to be scorned by men, He is revealing Himself to us in all the glory of His incomprehensible humility, for He stooped thus low in order to raise us to the dignity of being God's children. Therefore, it ought to be our delight to humble ourselves for love of Him.

When, therefore, the Jews intended to insult our Lord by calling Him a Nazarene, they were really, without knowing it, proclaiming His majesty and love, and honoring Him. The same is the case with those who ridicule Christ and His Church, and flatter themselves that they are doing right and are amusing. The foolish speeches which such people utter only serve to reveal more clearly the glory of Christianity, which they assail with their palsy, conceited words.

It is a remarkable result of the perversity produced by sin in the human heart, that a man is far more apt to be ashamed of what is good than of what is bad, of justice and truth rather than of injustice and falsehood. Hence the foolish language, to which I have referred, may easily tempt us to be ashamed of Christ, or at least to behave as if we did not care much for His doctrines or the commandments of His Church, etc.

We are afraid of boldly contradicting false statements and confessing our faith, lest we should be regarded as wanting in intellect or uneducated.

In short, figuratively, if not literally, we shrink from being called Nazarenes. Let us banish such fear of men from our hearts by thinking that our Divine Lord was willing to have the contemptuous name of Nazarene given also to Him.

How can we be His followers, if we always want to receive praise and applause even from those who are in error and who have no faith at all? If those who do not respect Christ, scorn and despise us; if they ridicule us because we love Him, let us regard it as an honor to be called Nazarenes, as He was. Let us not be satisfied merely to bear the name, but let us follow His example and be indeed also true Nazarenes as to Him.

Apart from its connection with the name of Nazareth, the word Nazarene is used in a sense derived from the Hebrew, and means solitary, dedicated to God, holy. Thus Simeon speaks of himself as a Nazarene, consecrated to God (Judges xvi, 17) and in every generation under the old dispensation there were men who cut themselves off from the world, making God their sole aim, and dedicating their whole life to virtue and the service of the Lord. Scripture describes Nazarenes of this sort as "whiter than snow, purer than milk, fairer than the sapphire."

The whiteness and purity of snow and milk symbolize the purity and innocence distinguishing these men, and the blue sapphire denotes the intention that animated them. It is easy to see how applicable in this sense the sacred name of Nazarene was to our Lord, and we ought to follow His example and be Nazarenes of this kind. May innocence dwell in your hearts, and may your whole lives be characterized by perfect purity. Pray often to Jesus and ask Him to be your guide, so that you may avoid everything that would make you unlike Him. In every word and thought show yourselves worthy to bear His holy name. His mind was always set on heaven; strive to direct all your thoughts thither. Make it your habit in early life to seek the things of eternity, not those of this world. Let not the joys and amusements of this life be of great importance in your sight, but make it your aim day by day to become more worthy of the delights of heaven. Let it not be your chief object to please your fellow creatures, but let all your thoughts be to avoid incur-

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ring God's displeasure; yes, strive to become more pleasing to Him every day, and let this be the chief care of your hearts. The world is always trying to entangle us with the numberless fancies and cravings of earth, and to make us forget God, but may it never reign supreme over you, but rather may the good resolution to attain to holiness, and by way of holiness to heaven, motive all your actions. May heaven be far more real and far more desirable to you than earth, may eternal happiness far outweigh all the happiness of this life, and may God be far more precious to you than men. May your efforts to love and serve Him be like a brilliant sapphire adorning the crown of everlasting glory, which from childhood on you have been doing your best to earn. In this way you may be Nazarenes indeed, holy, loyal to God, pure and heavenly-minded, like Jesus Christ, our great Example.

Jesus will help us, if we want to be Nazarenes in this sense; if we ourselves assure us of His readiness to assist us, for, according to another interpretation, it means branch, offshoot or blossom. This name was well suited to Him, for the prophet Isaiah calls Him the rod or shoot coming out of the root of Jesse, and the flower rising up out of it, i. e., out of David's family (Is. xi, 1). Jeremiah, too, speaks of the bud of justice which is to spring forth from David (Jer. xxiii, 15). This interpretation of the word Nazarene as meaning flower, branch or shoot suggests that in and through Christ alone we shall all find salvation; for our true welfare consists in our being closely united with Him. If we are branches of the Nazarene, branches of the true vine (which is Christ), the sap of Divine grace will flow from Him into our hearts, and enable us to bring forth the good fruit of holiness of life and purity of mind. As branches remain in union with Christ, so that our hearts may become a fair garden, in which the noblest virtues are the flowers. As true Nazarenes in this sense of the word, let us always ask our Lord not to withhold His grace, but to help us to practise all the virtues which will make us worthy of the name. Let us promise never to be ashamed of Him, but to cling to Him with holy faith and love. He will call it be for us when God calls us away from the exile of this life, if we are allowed to enter the eternal Nazareth, where Jesus is, and all His holy family, all who are truly His and have deserved to be called His elect, after living by His grace a life full of faith, purity and good will. Amen.

THEY HAD THE FAITH Present-day Catholics who excuse themselves from attendance at Mass and frequentation of the Sacraments because of the inconvenience which their devotion might involve, ought to find food for reflection in the story which a certain priest relates of what his own father and mother used to go through, in order that they might enjoy those blessings. "Every Saturday afternoon," he tells, "as soon as they were through with the day's work, they set out on foot for the far-off church. They would walk all night, with only such brief halts as were absolutely necessary for rest, and well on in the Sunday morning jaded and footsore, they would reach the church, having walked some forty miles. Then they would go to confession, hear Mass and go to Communion, take dinner at a house nearby, and after a brief rest would start away for home and walk the whole night through, arriving home on Monday morning early, in time for work again." It is not surprising that such parents were blessed with a priest son. And there could undoubtedly be cited many cases among our sturdy pioneers, where similar love for the Mysteries of Heaven was shown. "We could go to Communion and assist at the adorable sacrifice of the Mass," comments the Queen's Work,

In quoting the above experience, "with less effort all the year round than these holy pioneers made weary plodding to and from one Sunday Mass." That we fail to do so is bound to have an effect no less on our own spiritual lives, than on the timbre of faith in the generations that are to succeed us.—Catholic Transcript.

WHAT SHALL WE GIVE THEM?

Dear God, what shall we give them as they come— Our blind, our crippled—men with faces marred, Or aged by anguish, their young spirit scarred— Our soldier boys, come home? How may we show our reverence, our pride For all they dared, for courage clean and whole Of mind and body and resistless soul— These boys who have not died,

Yet who may feel, perchance, that Death so fine, Compared with lagging life thus twisted, drained Of Youth's bright eagerness. Life marred and stained— That Death were passing sweet? For they who die for Freedom still shall live In every heart that loved them, young and fair! But these, the living, wounded over there— To these what may we give?

Not gifts—such gifts as men give to the weak— But Work that lifts the spirit, flicks the will, Awakes to vital thought, to hopes that thrill— Such work as whole men seek! Not pity—never that!—nor coward fears But re-creating friendship, healing, grace, And gratitude not only for today But through the coming years!

And down those years the balm of memory, So when we meet some cripple, withered, gray, Some poor old soldier who yet in his day Did fight for liberty, We see not shabby garments, surly glance, But through the veiling flesh the gallant boy Who touched the Great Adventure— knew its joy And gave his Youth to France!

KING ALBERT RETURNS

The blood-red years have gone, and now once more A soldier-king has come into his own— The last marauding, wanton Hun has flown In terror and in impotence before The gallant onslaught of the troops that pour Triumphant, as the horns exulting blown To welcome back to his untarnished throne The man who proudest his country's honor bore. Down the broad road from Brussel's ancient gates A carpet woven by the women's hands Through prisoned months of weary patience waits— A welcome, spun of love, that understands A Queen who shared her people's agony, A King whose knightly courage set them free.

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

James Louis Small, in America. Somebody, I forget now who it was, once wrote a book and called it "The Red Badge of Courage." The phrase flashed across my mind the other evening while the band was playing retreat at the base hospital. The strains of "Over There" sounded bravely from the drill ground, as the sun sank majestically behind the purple hills. In front of the hospital stood a group of nurses, white capped, with capes thrown back, so that the scarlet beneath showed in vivid contrast to the dull brown of the earth underfoot and the sober uniforms of the doctors standing in ranks upon the porch.

Of how very much, thought I to myself, is that red symbolical! Often and often it occurs to me that of all who have enlisted in the other ranks, the nurse is less praised than others. Public speakers generally pass her by; newspapers celebrate her but occasionally; and the popular martial songs of the day make little, if indeed any, mention of her. Yet how would the war have been won without her. One of the camp welfare organizations has a double motto in its building that first provokes a smile and then a thought: "What is Home Without a Soldier? What is Camp Without a Nurse?"

What, indeed? If there are those in civil life—and we fear there are—who imagine that an army nurse's life consists in one long round of glory, its principal occupation being, as one witty woman said, "holding a sick soldier's head," then they had best disabuse themselves of that

notion as quickly as possible. As a matter of bare fact she lives in barracks, like any other soldier; she partakes of the abundant and nourishing food provided by the good U. S. A.; she works long hours at somewhat less than half the pay she would receive in civil life; with a uniform, not an inexpensive one, to furnish from her meager savings. Yet how magnificently she gives this modest little girl! She gives daily of her strength, her tact, her patience, and she gives to every agency of relief that asks for her support. During the late United War Work Campaign the welfare workers, forced into the task because there was no one else to undertake the duty, sat at the nurses' mess at the base hospital at Camp Dodge and wrote receipts for \$490, the total afterwards ran up to over \$600, and this from girls who had, during the worst epidemic this country has known for many a year, walked with sublime courage into places where the stoutest-hearted might well fear to tread.

And our Catholic nurses, what of them? To them hundreds of souls have during the past weeks owed a happy flight into eternity. Their fervor and devotion to the Faith is a rebuke to the spiritual idler and the drone. When one finds them eager for Mass, eager for additional opportunities for receiving the Bread of Life, thankful for the privilege of rising at five o'clock on a cold Thanksgiving morning to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion before the beginning of the day's grind, one is led to the unalterable conclusion that the tribute paid them by a certain army chaplain was no flight of rhetoric, but a simple statement of truth.

Fifty nurses and a little group of secretaries were gathered recently before the altar in a Knights of Columbus building at one of our midwestern camps. It was a Requiem Mass that was being celebrated for the nurses who had given up their lives that others might live. The simple music of the Mass was rendered by a choir of nurses, and before the altar lay an improvised bier upon which the flag of our country lay in loving folds and about which tapers burned. The congregation was made up of those who had known and walked daily with the beloved dead. There was even present one nurse who had lost her own sister in the plague. So soon as she had taken the body home and committed it to the earth she returned and took up her duties once more in the familiar wards. It was all very simple, all very touching, all very unostentatious. But so, for that matter, is the Gospel, and so were the first Holy Masses in the catacombs of the Eternal City.

At the close of Mass the chaplain turned to the little company. The words that he uttered were few and direct. There was a small need of polished diction or of fine flowing sentences. None knew better than he the history written in those grim wards during the awful weeks in late October and early November, and more, his hearers knew that he knew. But this he said, and it is as old as the everlasting hills, as perennially truthful as is the Church, the abode of holiness and truth: "Your lot is humble and hard and nerve-racking, but God, who is merciful, throws about you something of the Divine. To more than one poor boy, tossing in the fever of delirium, you come as a veritable angel of mercy. You have fought and won as truly as the soldier on the battlefield or in the trenches. Living, you live in honor. Dying, you gain the reward that comes to those who toil and who attain."

People complain of ingratitude for benefits, and of the neglect of whole some advice. In the best of places, we are seldom thought of in it. The person who gives it either contents himself to lay down certain vague, general maxims, and "wise saws," which we knew before; or, instead of considering what we ought to do, recommends what he himself would do. He merely substitutes his own will, caprice and prejudices for ours, and expects us to be guided by them. Instead of changing places with us (to see what is best to be done in the given circumstances), he insists on our looking at the question from his point of view, and attaining to such a manner as to please him.—Hazlitt.

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