

FIVE-MINUTE SERMONS.

Second Sunday in Lent. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

This is the will of God, your sanctification. (Epistle of the day.) What, my dear brethren, is the will of Almighty God and of the Catholic Church, which is directed by His Holy Spirit, in establishing for us this fast of Lent, and commanding us to observe it? What is the end which He meant that every Christian should attain by keeping it, and which makes the opportunity now offered to us such a great grace as we were warned last week that it is? The words of St. Paul to-day answer these questions for us. "The will of God," he says, His intention for us at all times indeed, but especially now, "is our sanctification."

But what is our sanctification? It is the making us saints. That, then, is what Lent ought to do for us. It ought to make us saints: God and His Church mean that it should. "Well," perhaps you may say, "if that is the end for which Lent is appointed, it seems to me that the end is seldom attained. For my part, I am afraid I shall never be a saint; saints are few and far between. It will take more than one Lent to make a saint out of such a sinner as I am."

If, then, you say this, I must confess that there is a good deal of truth in it. We must all feel and acknowledge that. Any one who could feel sure now that when Easter comes he will be fit to be canonized must either be very proud and presumptuous, and far from real sanctity, or have some special revelation from God, to which, I think, none of us will pretend. But for all that it is true that Lent ought to sanctify us; it ought to make us saints, only we need not take the word in quite so high a sense. Though we may hope for the greatest possible gifts now, we cannot confidently expect them. There is, however, a sanctification that we ought to expect from this Lent, and what is it? It is what I fear many of us, even though tolerably good Christians, do not expect. What do I mean by a tolerably good Christian? I mean, of course, one who expects to make his Easter duty. One who does not expect and mean to do that can hardly be called a tolerably good Christian; it would be more nearly right to call him an intolerably bad one. Well, then, you who are good Christians expect to make your Easter duty; so far, so good. But it is not far enough. For what is it that is meant, perhaps, by that? Is it not merely to make up your mind to confess your sins and to keep for a few days as you ought to be, and then be pretty much as you were before? Has not that been the experience of the past Easter duties to a not a few of you, my brethren; and may not the same be said of the missions you have attended, and the other great graces you have received from time to time in your life? You came up to the surface, as a fish jumps out of the water for a moment, and then down you went again.

But that is not enough. That is not sanctification, and it is not the will or intention of God. What you ought to expect is much more than that. What, then, is it? It is simply this: that when you have made your Easter duty you are going to stay all your life where it will put you. It is that the habits of mortal sin which you may then have to confess will be gone for good; that those impure thoughts, words and actions which have stopped for ever; that the shameful drunkenness, and all the sins which came from it, will be things only of the past; that you will never again wilfully neglect holy Mass; that in every way you will really live as you ought, all the time in the state of grace, in peace with God and men, and in readiness to die at any time, even without the sacraments, if such should be God's will; that, in short, you will be truly converted to Him once for all.

That is the sanctification which past Lent has not brought you, but which this one should. Do not, I beg you, think it impossible, for it is not only possible but easy. Do not make your Easter duty the highest point and the end of your Christian life; it should be only the beginning of it. What a consolation it will be to you, if in your future life you can look back on this Lent and say, "That was the time when I really began to be a good Christian; since then I have not had much on my conscience; I have kept in the state of grace. I made really good and strong resolutions then, and I have been faithful to them ever since."

There are those now, plenty of them, who can say this of some past Lent. Let it be now your turn to say it of this one. It is not a matter of luck and chance; if you will, this grace of a lasting conversion from sin is now offered to each and every one of you. It is yours to a certainty, if you will take the trouble to secure it; for it is the will of God.

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A MAY-DAY GIFT.

By MARY CATHERINE CROWLEY.

III.

For two or three days Mrs. Clayton suffered the oratory to remain as the children had arranged it. They said their prayers there morning and evening; and to Abby especially the ridges and patches in the carpet, which now seemed to stare her out of countenance, the pink vases, the candelabra, were a constant reproach for her disobedience. Larry, too, grew to hate the sight of them. He often realized poignantly also that it was not well to be too easily influenced by one's playmates; for if he happened to be late and ran into the room and popped down on his knees in a hurry, he was almost sure to start up again with an exclamation caused by the prick one of the numerous tacks which he had inadvertently left scattered over the floor.

When the good mother thought that the admonition which she wished to convey was sufficiently impressed, she had the carpet taken up, repaired as much as possible, and properly laid. Then she hung soft lace curtains at the window, draped the altar anew, took away the pink vases, and put the finishing touches to the oratory. It was now a lovely little retreat. Abby and Larry never tired of admiring it. They went in and out of the room many times during the day; and the image of the Blessed Virgin, ever there to greet them, by its very presence taught them sweet lessons of virtue. For who can look upon a statue of Our Lady without being reminded of her motherly tenderness, her purity and love; without finding, at least for a moment, his thoughts borne upward, as the angels bore the body of the dead St. Catherine, from amid the tumult of the world to the holy heights, the very atmosphere of which is prayer and peace?

Whenever Abby felt cross or disagreeable, she hid herself in the oratory until her ill-humor had passed. This was certainly a great improvement upon her former habit, under such circumstances, of provoking a quarrel with Larry, teasing Della, and taxing her mother's patience to the utmost. She liked to go there, too, in the afternoon when she came in from play, when twilight crept on and deepened, and the flame of the little altar lamp that her father had given her shone like a tiny star amid the dusk of the quiet room. Larry liked it better when, just after supper, the candles of the candelabra were all lighted, and the family gathered around the shrine and said the Rosary together.

To Abby belonged the welcome charge of keeping the oratory in order, while Larry always managed to have a few flowers for his vase, even if they were only dandelions or buttercups. He and his sister differed about the placing of this offering. "What a queer you are!" said Abby to him one day. "Your vase has a pretty wild rose painted on it, yet you always set it with the plain side out. Nobody'd know it was anything but a plain white vase. You ought to put it round this way," she added, turning it so that the rose would show.

"No, I won't!" protested Larry, twisting it back again. "The prettiest side ought to be toward the Blessed Virgin." "Oh—well—to be sure, in one way!" began Abby. "But, then, the shrine is all for her, and this is only a statue. What difference does it make which side of the vase is toward a statue? And it looks so funny to see the wrong side turned to the front. Some day we'll be bringing Annie Conwell and Jack Tyrrell, and some of mother's friends, up here; and just think how they'll laugh when they see it."

Larry flushed, but he answered firmly: "I don't care—the prettiest side ought to be toward the Blessed Virgin."

"But it is only a statue!" persisted Abby, testily. "Of course I know it is only a statue," replied her brother, raising his voice a trifle; "for she was really well as you do. But I think Our Lady in heaven understands that I put the vase that way because I want to give her the best I have. And I don't care whether any one laughs at it or not. That vase isn't here so Annie Conwell or Jack Tyrrell or anybody else will think it looks pretty, but only for the Blessed Virgin—so there!"

Larry, having expressed himself with such warmth, subsided. Abby did not venture to turn the vase again. She was vaguely conscious that she had been a little too anxious to "show off" the oratory, and had thought rather too much of what her friends would say in regard to her arrangement of the altar.

It was about this time that Aunt Kitty and her little daughter Claire came to stay a few days with the Claytons. Claire was only four years old. She had light, fluffy curls and brown eyes, and was so dainty and graceful that she seemed to Abby and Larry like a talking doll when she was comparatively quiet, and a merry, roguish fairy when she romped with them.

"How do you happen to have such lovely curls?" asked Abby of the fascinating little creature. "Oh, mamma puts every curl into a wee nightcap of its own when I go to bed!" answered the child, with a playful shake of the head. Larry thought this very droll. "Isn't she cunning?" he said. "But what can she mean?" "Your mother puts your hair into a

nightcap!" cried Abby. "Those are curl papers, I suppose." "No, nightcaps," insisted the little one. "That's the right name." The children puzzled over it for some time; but finally Aunt Kitty came to the rescue, and explained that she rolled them on bits of muslin or cotton, to give them the soft, pretty appearance which Abby so much admired; because Claire's father liked her to have curls, and the poor child's hair was naturally as straight as a pipe stem.

"Come and see our chapel, Claire," said Abby; the word oratory did not yet come trippingly to her tongue. Claire was delighted with the beautiful image, and behaved as decorously as if she were in church. Afterward the children took her to walk. They went into the park, in which there were many handsome flower pots, several fountains, and a number of fine pieces of marble statuary. Claire seemed to be much impressed with the latter.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, pointing to them reverently. "Look at all the Blessed Virgins!" The children laughed. She stood looking at them with a little frown, not having quite made up her mind whether to join in their mirth or to be vexed. When her sister was explaining to her, she said, with a pout: "Well, if they are not Blessed Virgins, then I don't care about them, and I'm going home."

The children had promptly sent a note to Father Dominic thanking him for his appropriate May-Day gift. Each had a share in the composition of this acknowledgment, but it had been carefully copied by Abby. Later they had the satisfaction of showing him the oratory. While Claire was with them, he happened to call again one evening just as the young people were saying good-night.

"Larry," whispered Abby, when they went upstairs and she knelt with her brother and cousin before the little altar—"Larry, let's say our prayers real loud, so Father Dominic will know how good we've got to be since we've had the lovely statue." "All right," said Larry, obediently. They began, Abby leading off in clear, distinct accents, and Larry following in a heavy alto; for his voice was unusually deep and sonorous for such a little fellow. Baby Claire listened wonderingly. Then, apparently making up her mind that the clamor was due to the intensity of their fervor, she joined with her shrill treble, and prayed with all her might and main.

To a certain extent, they succeeded in their object. The din of their devotions soon penetrated to the library, where their friend Father Dominic was chatting with Mr. and Mrs. Clayton. In a few moments the latter stepped quietly into the lower hall. "Abby!" she called, softly. The little girl pretended not to hear, and kept on. "Abby!"—there was a decision in the tone which was not to be trifled with. "What is it, mother?" she asked, with an assumption of innocence, breaking off so suddenly as to startle her companions. "Not so loud, dear. You can be heard distinctly in the library."

Abby and Larry snickered; Claire giggled without knowing why. Then Abby applied herself with renewed earnestness and volubility to the litany. She did not intend any disrespect: on the contrary, she meant to be very devout. But she not only believed in the injunction "Let your light shine before men," but felt that it behooved her to attract Father Dominic's attention to the fact that it was shining. Clearer and higher rose her voice; deeper and louder sounded Larry's; more shrilly piped Claire.

"Abby!" called Mrs. Clayton again, with grave displeasure. "That will do. Children, go to your rooms at once." The others stole off without another word, but Abby lingered a minute. Father Dominic was going, and she could not resist the impulse to wait and learn what impression their piety had made. Leaning over the balusters, she saw him laughing in an amused manner. Then he said to her mother: "Tell Abby she has such a good, strong voice, I wish I could have her read the prayers for the Sodality. She would surely be heard all over the church."

He went away, and Abby crept upstairs with burning cheeks and an unpleasant suspicion that she had made herself ridiculous. Mrs. Clayton suspected that her little daughter had overheard the message. She therefore spared the children any reference to the subject. But the next time they met Father Dominic he alluded, as if casually, to the devotions suitable for May, and then quite naturally went on to speak of the virtues of the Blessed Virgin, especially of her humility and love of retirement; saying how, although the Mother of God, she was content to lead a humble, hidden life at Nazareth, with no thought or wish to proclaim her goodness from the house-tops. The lesson was gently and kindly given, but Abby was shrewd enough and sufficiently well disposed to understand. She felt that she was indeed learning a great deal during the middle of the month there was a stir of pleasurable excitement at St. Mary's school.

"Suppose we get up a May drama among the younger pupils?" suggested Marion Gaines, the leading spirit of the graduating class. The proposition was received with enthusiasm, and Mother Rosalie was applied to for permission. "Yes," she answered, "you have my consent to your plans; but on one

condition—that you arrange the drama and drill the children yourselves. It will be good practice for you in the art of composition; and, by teaching others, you will prove whether or not you have profited by Professor Willet's lessons in elocution."

The graduates were delighted. "That is just like Mother Rosalie," said Marion. "She is willing to trust us, and leaves us to our own resources, so that if we succeed all the credit will be ours. Now we must draw up a plan. Shall we decide upon a plot, and then each work out a portion of it?" "Oh, dear, I never could think of anything!" declared one. "I should not know how to manage the dialogue. My characters would be perfect sticks," added a second. "I can't even write an interesting letter," lamented some one else. "I respectfully suggest that Marion and Ellen be requested to compose the drama," said the first speaker, with mock ceremony. "I agree with all my heart" cried one. "And I,"—"and I!" chimed in the others.

"It is a unanimous vote," continued their spokesman, turning to the young ladies in question, with low bow. "But we shall have all the work," objected Marion. "No; we will take a double share at the rehearsals, and they will be no small share of the trouble." "I'll do it if you will, Ellen," began Marion. "I don't mind trying," agreed Ellen.

Thus the matter was settled. "Let us first select the little girls to take part in our drama," Marion continued. "There's Annie Conwell," said one. "And Lucy Garry," interposed another. So they went on, till they had chosen ten or twelve little girls.

"As it is to be a May piece, of course we must have a Queen," said Ellen. "Yes; and let us have Abby Clayton for the Queen," rejoined Marion. "Abby is passably good-looking and rather graceful; besides, she has a clear, strong voice, and plenty of self-confidence. She would not be apt to get flustered. Annie Conwell, now, is a dear child; but perhaps she would be timid, and it would spoil the whole play if the Queen should break down. After school the little girls were invited into the graduates' class-room; and, although not a word of the drama had yet been written, the principal parts were then and there assigned. Lucy Garry was to have the opening address, Annie as many lines as she would undertake, and so on.

Abby was delighted to find that she was chosen for the most prominent role. She ran all the way home, and skipped gaily into the house and up to the sitting room, where Mrs. Clayton was sewing. "O mother!" she exclaimed, tossing off her hat and throwing her books upon the table, "we are to have a lovely drama at our school, and I'm to be the May Queen!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

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