

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

REV. F. P. HICKERY, O. S. B.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD

"At Thy word, I will let down the net." (Luke v. 5.)

Nothing, my dear brethren, is more seldom to be found than a total trust in God—doing everything simply because God wills it and says it. Our own judgment, common sense, human respect, spoil most of our actions. There is no reward for obeying them. It is a difficult lesson to learn—and yet the very foundation of a good Catholic spirit—that it is always the best and the wisest thing to do, to give up our own will, disregard what men may say, and faithfully do what God would have us do.

This lesson is taught us, in the Gospel of the day, in the easiest and most interesting manner—viz., by example.

Jesus was so thronged by the crowds that He borrowed Simon's boat and taught the multitudes from that. This is almost at the beginning of His public life. The minds of men were not decided what to think of this new Teacher. Their present state was one of wonder. They watched Him, listened to Him, crowded after Him, curious and eager. The good wondered and believed; the bad wondered and sneered.

Jesus, then, taught the multitude from out the boat, and when He had concluded, He turned to Peter with the words, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught."

Now, my dear brethren, were these words according to common sense? That is a question we often ask ourselves when we find God's Will not in accord with our own. The plea of common sense is a frequent excuse for not doing what we should, but, rather, what we want to do. Look, then, what must these fishermen have thought of this command?—We can tell from Peter's answer. "We have toiled all the night and caught nothing. The night was the time for their fishing, and not the blazing noonday. They had exerted all their skill, exhausted all their patience—tossing all the night and brought up nothing but weeds and mire. To cast their nets again now is certain disappointment. If the fish had avoided their nets in the darkness of the night, much more will they shun them now, with the Syrian sun glaring from the heavens.

There is more, too, than St. Peter's own judgment concerned. It is a public thing. His brother fishermen are all around. The crowds gazing curiously from the shore. St. Peter was hurt that his Master had asked him this one thing. He is asked to expose him to ridicule and failure! He trembled at the thought of drawing up the net in the face of all—empty. He fancied he heard already the laughter and the taunts that would greet him.

And what did St. Peter do? Did he shirk it? excuse himself from doing it? Common sense, his own judgment, human respect, were alike all powerless against the simple word, the wish, the command of Christ. We have toiled all the night and caught nothing; our efforts, useless then, now seem to us foolish, nevertheless, "at Thy word I will let down the net."

Oh, blessed example of noble-hearted faith! Oh, may we have the grace in like difficulties to imitate St. Peter. And Catholics in a Protestant country must often meet trials, and find themselves in positions requiring faith and courage to quit themselves like men and obey God. Let our strength be in this, "At Thy word." For every command of Christ contains a secret promise—the promise of strength to obey, the promise of a blessing if we do.

St. Peter cast the net, not in the bare hope of a chance, but in assured trust of success!

"Launch out into the deep," Jesus says to all of us. But what answer do we make? We remain timid, cast the net they filled both ships, so that they began to sink. "And St. Peter was astonished and all that were with him at the draught of the fishes which they had taken." All night they had toiled for nothing, but this one draught more than recompensed all their labor.

It is the Lord's constant way to keep us waiting long, and then answer speedily at the end; to let many hours seem quite unproductive and then at once to grant more than enough to repay the labor of all.

Faith in Christ never disappoints. All else does; especially trusting to ourselves and trying to please men. And what did St. Peter do? He

fell at Jesus' knees, and cried: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Not that he would have Christ go, for he forthwith forsook all things and followed Him. But his humility confessed that he was unworthy of God's mercies. He obeyed once against the promptings of self judgment and human respect—at Christ's word he let down the net, and see the reward of that one act of obedience. He forsook all, followed Christ, became an Apostle and the Prince of the Apostles.

So we, too, if we overcome ourselves generally and obey God, and the voice of His Holy Church, we shall find it easy afterwards to follow Him faithfully, for obstacles and difficulties will miraculously disappear at the word of the Master.

FRENCH NUNS AT THE FRONT

An old Ushaw chaplain in England contributes to the Ushaw Magazine an interesting article in which he recounts a few personal incidents to illustrate the courage, heroism and loyalty the French nuns have displayed:

"The first time I went up the line was after a heavy attack on the part of the Germans, in which they met with partial success. It was at a time when the English were none too numerous, and candidly, we did not know what would follow. 'Villages near the line' were ordered to be evacuated, and those who have seen the exodus of these poor people will never be able to forget it. I must dismiss the description with the phrase that it was heartrending, but everywhere you saw the nuns, who must have been as much afflicted as anyone, aiding, helping, and giving consolation. They were guides, philosophers, friends. In the hope of helping, I asked one of the sisters what could be done. She actually smiled in answering that it would be all right, they would be well cared for by the good sisters in the Convent de Ste. —, in a town a few kilometres back. Gas had just been used by the Germans, and fear of the hidden death was gripping us in a way that made that smile a thing of value. We were not finished with the sisters even on that day, for later on within measurable distance of the line, we were greeted by the Reverend Mother and her community from the steps of a convent, which even then held some of our wounded and gassed."

MAKING GAS-MASKS FOR THE BRITISH

Continuing, the Chaplain tells the following: "As is well known, the gas found us more or less unprepared, and even in the zone of it these sisters had materially helped our own authorities to cope with the ghastly results that attended its use. More than that, for hour after hour all through the night, with death imminent to each and everyone of them, they helped to make the first of our gas masks. My brigadier knew this, and he passed the word down 'eyes left,' and gave them the full military salute, as the men passed their convent."

WHY THE NUNS COULD NOT LEAVE

Later, when attached to an advanced dressing station near the German lines, the chaplain, on his first morning there, went round the ruined place.

Coming round the ruins of the church, I suddenly came face to face with a nun, and naturally I expressed my surprise. I then learned that the second respectable abode in the place had been, and was still, a convent. The sisters had obtained special leave to stay where they were, though apart from ourselves they were the only occupants of the village. I knew the place to be frequently shelled, indeed, there were abundant proofs of the fact whenever one looked, so I asked why they stayed. The answer was, to bring me inside the convent and to take me to the chapel. "We cannot leave it," said the sister; "besides we help at the other convent over yonder, and there is no room for us to stay there."

THEIR UTTER DESTINATION

"Then follows the pathetic reference to the straits to which the sisters were reduced: "After breakfast I went over to the 'other' convent, which lay in one of those lucky neighborhoods where shells had never fallen, and which consequently I found full of refugees who were being cared for by the nuns. Later on in the day, I saw two nuns obviously returning from a little tour of the soldiers' billets farther down the line; they were carrying a huge clothes-basket which was full of things that we English soldiers had thrown away. Curious again—but I hope not entirely so—I asked what they would do with it all, and was promptly told, 'Eat it.' Only a few days later a shell tore its way through the kitchen of the little convent opposite to our dressing station, and though the shells were coming with a steady regularity, one of our orderlies came to me with the message that one of the ladies wanted me. It was to tell me that two of the sisters were killed and two others wounded. I found white faces but no tears and no hysterics; indeed, the bearing of the sisters lent a dignity to the tragedy that is impossible to explain."

ON BRITISH RATIONS

Eventually the nuns gave up their school to the British authorities, re-

taining only an isolated part of the building for their own use.

"The writer was asked where he was billeted, and when he returned to his billet after acquainting the general of the offer, he found that a bed, pillow, and sheets, and little odds and ends had been sent from the convent to make him comfortable. Subsequently, the general came to pay his respects to the sisters, the immediate result of which was that, as they had none too much to live upon, they were put upon the ration of the British Expeditionary Force. A field ambulance soon after took up its station near the convent, and indeed utilized all that was left of it for its work, and from that time on a friendly rivalry existed between the sisters and the unit as to who would show more acts of kindness the one to the other."—Catholic Bulletin.

THE WAYSIDE CALVARY

It is to be regretted that the splendid spirit which pervades the writings of that broad-minded Methodist chaplain, Thomas Tiplady, is not found to a greater extent in the works of his co-religionists. No Catholic can read his books without feeling admiration for a man who, though a Protestant, can write so sympathetically of Catholic practices. A long experience at the western front, where he witnessed the practical benefits of the Catholic religion, has doubtless had its broadening effect upon him and taught him the value of Catholic devotion. It is safe to say that henceforth the Catholic Church will have a different meaning for him and for the thousands of Protestant soldiers who during this war will, for the first time, come in intimate contact with Catholicism.

Writing of the Wayside Calvary, which is seen so frequently at the crossroads in France, Mr. Tiplady concludes with the following beautiful sentiments: "After the Benediction we went our several ways, but two of our lads walked with me to the crossroads. From there my way lay through a piece of open country for some two miles. The night was dark and the wind wailed over the fields. On my right I could plainly see the flashes and flares that light up the battle-front at night. They held my eyes with a strange fascination as I turned my solitary way. Suddenly I turned to a clump of trees on my left and there saw what I had already seen by day—a tall, stone cross with a small bronze figure of Christ nailed upon it. There the cross stood in the gloom, with just sufficient light to show forth its solemn grandeur. Protestant though I am, when I looked at the figural lights on the French front and then turned again to the cross, I could not forbear to lift my hand to Him in salute. I know now why it is that on the French roads you see representations of the Crucifixion rather than the Ascension. It is that this weary, war-stricken world needs assurance of God's love rather than of His power. "There on the right were our sons being sacrificed, but there on the left the representation of the sacrifice of God's Son. The men I had knelt with at the sacrament had been twelve months in the trenches. They knew the meaning of those lights on my right, but they knew also, the meaning of that cross on my left and, standing between the two, they could say, 'God is love.'"

CHRISTIAN TRAINING NEEDED

The first dominant reason for the existence of the Catholic school system is that the thought, the teaching and the love and fear of God may be set in the heart of the child, says Archbishop Glennon. We hold, even at the cost of being called old-fashioned, that neither in ancient or modern days, nor in ancient or modern nations, nor in democracies or in monarchies, is it possible to get along without Almighty God. We must for our Government and for ourselves seek His sanction, acknowledge His power and observe His laws. And these things we shall not know and cannot do unless we are taught and trained therein.

It is not, however, to sanction and sustain human society and government alone that religious instruction is imparted in the Catholic schools; it has the higher motive, too, namely that for life here and that other life which we believe in religion is a necessity, and consequently, also, its teaching.

And for a second reason we would state the foundation for Catholic education that we desire to impart, in addition to all the elements of secular education, those laws and principles of moral and religious life which are necessary for the well-being of the individual and the community, among which can be noted with special emphasis the virtues of humility and obedience, the sense of duty and the consecration of service.—Sacred Heart Review.

AN OBJECTION ANSWERED

One of the greatest difficulties even faithful Catholics have to contend with in regard to the dogma of eternal punishment is this: How can any one be happy in heaven, knowing that those or some of those whom one has loved best on earth (a parent, husband, wife, child, etc.) are suffering eternal torments in hell? Mr. J. Godfrey Raupert, in his little book on "Hell and its Problems," meets this objection as follows: "It is conceivable that the affections of earth will experience a considerable change when we shall learn to distinguish between Divine and human love, and when we see things in their right proportions. We love a person here on earth because of that person's character and apparent perfections. But we may be grievously mistaken respecting them and may regard that as virtue which, from the Divine standpoint, is not virtue at all, but self-love and selfishness. A perverted nature may, as we all know, be incited to love even by vice. We cannot, for instance, conceive of a saint loving those whose inner nature is alienated from God, and whose character, however attractive from the human point of view, has no beauty or attractiveness from God's point of view. He could not love them any longer since God loves them no longer. Here on earth, we cannot possibly form an accurate judgment of any character, and cannot therefore say that this person or the other has reached a condition of soul which renders him no longer worthy of esteem and love. We experience

AMERICAN CATHOLIC SOLDIERS JOLT INFIDEL INKKEEPER

A local innkeeper in France, who prides himself on his easy-going religion of a free-thinker and anti-clerical, had the surprise of his life when some American troops arrived in his village. He was looking forward to some profit, and to his disappointment found that the Americans were not drinking men. So he looked forward to revenge next day, which was Sunday, when no doubt the Americans would show no little contempt for priests and churches, but his further disappointment was greater still.

Near the village church there were gathered some fifty American soldiers chatting and smoking. After a few moments there appeared a black figure walking on the road leading

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to the church. It was the priest supplied for the cure who had been called up for military service. There was a word of command, and the men sprang to attention and saluted the mud-covered priest as he passed and to the surprise of the innkeeper they followed him into the church.

It was too much for the innkeeper, who could not imagine that such enlightened men as the Americans could possibly want to pray. So his curiosity led him to the door of the church, where he looked in to see what they were doing. To his surprise and indignation the American soldiers were kneeling before the altar, their prayer books or rosaries in their hands, and they were singing with all their powers the Credo of the Mass. He is not the only Frenchman who has been surprised in this manner, and the surprise will probably work to their benefit.—London Catholic War Service Bureau.

WITH THE PSYCHICS

We are told that new interest has been manifested in spiritualism as a result of the innumerable deaths in the War. The recent action of the Holy Father in sending forth a fresh warning of the evils and dangers of spiritualism is sufficient proof that the matter is important.

Further proof is given by the large number of magazine articles appearing in defence of this strange cult. Sir Oliver Lodge, long a well-known dabbler in the psychic, and Sir Connal Doyle, who prefers spiritualistic mediums to the "Communion of the Saints" in which he was brought up, are the leading pamphleteers in this movement.

Recently one, Alfred W. Martin, lectured in this city on "Sir Oliver Lodge and his latest evidence for a future life." The lecturer said in the course of his remarks: "Reviewing the evidence with all the impartiality and candor of which I am capable, I confess that it appears nebulous, elusive, halting, confused. On all crucial points, the medium 'Edda' through whom Raymond (Lodge's deceased son) is said to be speaking, is painfully brief, while on all matters of no particular consequence the medium is unusually garrulous. And this criticism applies not only to the evidence offered in this latest book, but also to that adduced by Sir Oliver in earlier writings. Here as elsewhere he exhibits the error of inferring from the mere conceivability of a disembodied spirit's existing, the probable existence of it."

"The next step in the progress of such study" continues Mr. Martin "might well be the appointment by the Society for Refined Psychological Research, (note the 'refined') of a commission to institute a fresh and

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a difficulty in conceiving of a fixed final state of the soul. We look upon every person as capable of improvement, and here and now Christianity extends its arms of mercy to the most debased and unworthy of men. It is our duty, therefore, to exercise active love toward every man, even though he may have forfeited all claim to our respect. But the case will be very different in the other world, and after the Judgment. Earthly love there will have changed its character, and will have become transformed. It will view all things in a wholly different light, and from the standpoint of a wider knowledge and a more perfect discernment. And it is surely conceivable that, in the light of that perfect love, the soul's nature will experience such a radical transformation that the attachment and affections of earth will no longer hinder its most perfect peace and its enjoyment of unalloyed happiness."—St. Paul Bulletin.

THE FATHER'S INFLUENCE

Many a man has given up smoking, or drinking, or swearing, or gambling, as his sons began to emerge from childhood and showed an ambition to imitate him in his bad habits as well as in his good.

We can all remember some older person whose ways influenced us when we were young. The father of boys, therefore, should take thought over his conduct to make sure that it will edify them and not mislead them into evil. They have a right to good example from him. They have a right to see him practice his religion—say his daily prayers, keep his temper, go to his work, abstain from meat on Fridays, go to Mass on Sunday, receive Holy Communion, etc., etc. They have a right to expect that they may model their conduct on his. They have a right to look to him to guide them in the way that will lead to eternal life.—Catholic Columbian.

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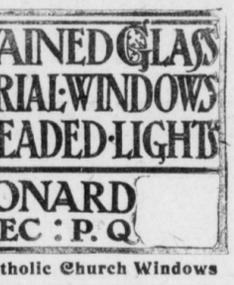
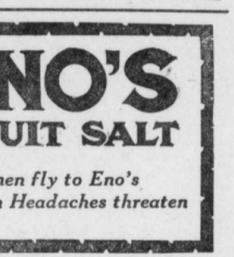
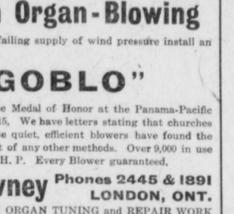
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A CLEVER PRIEST

Fr. Fitzgerald, O. F. M., who is a master in cheerful humor, tells this fine story:

"One Jack Crowley, was a mason, and he was building a steeple in his native city, Cork. It was half-way up. One morning the parish priest, a Kerry man, went up the scaffolding to see the progress of the work. Jack had a bottle of whiskey in his pocket, and when he heard the footsteps he shoved it into the wall he was building, intending to take it out later. But the P. P. (parish priest), not without a twinkle, opened his breviary and sat down to read his office, and Jack had to go on building over and around the bottle until two or three feet of masonry covered it up. The P. P. turned up again in the morning, and up higher went the wall, and the bottle remained imprisoned in its hole in the steeple. Years rolled by, Jack Crowley got older and grayer. But he never passed that steeple without stopping to look up at where his fine bottle of whiskey was, getting older, too, but mellow.—St. Anthony Messenger.



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