

## The Cleansing of the Temple

Sermon Preached by the Bishop of Fredericton at the Quebec Synod, 1918.

"And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought, saying, 'My house is the house of prayer, and ye have made it a den of thieves.'" —LUKE XIX: 45-46

I SEEM to see in this old-time Gospel story a picture of what is going on in the world to-day, a picture, perhaps, of what is always going on in the world, a parable of human life. For there are other temples than this in which the glory of Judaism had been thus debased, and to which there came this sudden cleansing—temples not, indeed, built with hands, and set apart to God's glory with services of solemn consecration, and yet none the less temples of the Living God—temples, too, which have been defiled by the evil deeds of men, and which in the eyes of those who worship in them have largely lost their essential sanctity. Let me think at this time of three such temples, as I try to show to you the relation of each to this solemn story.

(1) And think first of the temple of the world's religious life. Obviously the simplest suggestion of story. I need not labour with argument and illustration to make that clear. The application lies upon the very surface. The organic structure of the world's religious life is the temple of God. Our holy Faith is His dwelling-place.

Am I right, my brothers, if I urge upon you the need of a cleansing in that direction? Am I right in bringing against the Church this stern indictment? Am I right if I insist that the conditions which characterized Jewish religious life, and which brought upon it our Lord's scathing condemnation, have their close counterpart and correspondent in the religious life that is our own?

It ought to be enough to support such a statement by an appeal to what is going on in the world to-day. For what else is the meaning and the message of this dreadful war? What else the roar of cannon and the shriek of shell? What else the blood and brutality of this hatred-sowing strife? What else the deification of ruthless might? What else the reckless tyranny of mailed fist and shining armour? What else the cynical surrender of national honour? What else the tortuous statesmanship that makes truth subservient to lies? What else the policy of piracy that rejoices in the murder of unarmed men? What else the callous and calculated cruelty that drops bombs on hospitals and open cities? What are all these things save the crucifixion of Christian character? What, indeed, is the entire propaganda of German kultur but the deliberate denial of Jesus Christ? And all this, be it remembered, from a nation that stands in the forefront of the world's material progress, and to those scholars and theologians, alas, the Church in its blindness was learning more and more to look for light and leadership.

What is the lesson of it all? Not the dethronement of one nation from its position of pre-eminence and power in the minds of men. Not the passing of solemn sentence upon a single people. Not these things alone. The voice that comes to us, as it has come to all the world, from the break-down of German Christianity is a voice of solemn warning. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." My brothers, if as an Empire we can stand before the bar of conscience, and justify our intervention in this war, and I think we can; if as an Empire we can challenge the

verdict of history upon the methods of our warfare, and I think we can; if as an Empire we can rightly ask God's blessings on our arms, and once more I think we can; if we can do these things, we are none the less bound, nay, we are all the more bound, to scrutinize most carefully the foundations of our national character. For great will be our loss if the calamity that has overtaken German Christianity should tend to make us satisfied with what we are, if it should minister to our spiritual pride, if it should fail to drive us to our knees in penitence and shame, if it should not awaken in us as a people the fear lest in our own religion there should be the seeds of the same black and bitter harvest.

For to be sure, my brothers, that the weakness is not a German weakness only. It is wider far than that. It belongs more or less to the entire Christian world. The temple itself in which we worship has been profaned. How thin the veneer of Christian character with which pagan passions and pagan principles have been disguised! How much there is of Christ in name, and how little there is of Him in reality! How superficial the sunshine of Christian love! How deep the shadow of selfish sin!

We did not know these things. We did not understand them. Our eyes were blinded so that we could not see. Only here and there were men found who suspected the failure of the Faith, and what they suspected is now only seen in the fierce light of the war. For is it not the almost overwhelming witness of the war that when the day of sudden trial came the Church was found unequal to the task? Everywhere there appeared evidences of impotence and insignificance. There came to the Church an extraordinary opportunity, and the Church did not seize it. There opened before her a great doorway, and she did not enter. As one wisely said, the Church first satisfied herself that the war was justified, and then slowed down instead of going ahead.

Do I seem to overstate the case, to make too much of a danger that does undoubtedly exist? Well, look out upon the Church as you yourself can see it. Scan the roll of almost every congregation. You will find plenty of earnest-minded men and women,—plenty of faithful followers of Jesus Christ,—plenty who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,—plenty of these, thank God,—but plenty also who cling closely to the creed, and never embrace the spirit of its truth, who have accepted the historic faith, but have never accepted the historical Saviour, who confidently affirm their faith in God, yet only seldom kneel before Him in the House of Prayer, who reverence the Bible as the rule of life, and do not read it, who reverence the Sacraments as appointed means of grace, and do not lean on them, who call themselves disciples and do not learn of Jesus, who talk much about their rights, and think only seldom of their duties, who cling closely to the form of religion, whilst with the vehemence of silent apathy they repudiate its spirit, whose faith is only a thing of outward form, whose religion is little more than a splendidly articulated skeleton.

My brothers, you at least who are priests in the Church of God, know that this is true. You know that in the temple of the world's religious life there is this that I have said. You can exhibit in your respective parishes the outward signs of spiritual life, but can you make me feel the throbbing of its heart? You can point me to the machinery of moral effort, but can you show me its secret power? You can exhibit the scaffolding of outward form, but can you lead me into the temple of the hidden life?

These are pertinent questions, and we do well to ask them. They are clamouring, in-

deed, for answer in the tumult of the war. Is the Church a place of spiritual power? Is our Christianity really Christian? Is our religion real? Is it alive? The Church is not dead. There is still throbbing in its veins the pulse of power. It is still warm with the breath of life. The Church is not dead. The Church can never die. It is the body of Him who was dead, and who is alive for evermore. Yet there are in the Church those whose life is only in the seeming, souls to which indeed there once came the sacramental summons, souls in which there was once upon a time "a noise and a shaking" as of travail of a new creation, souls that were once new-born children of the kingdom, and yet souls that are really dead.

Many years ago the City of Pompeii was uncovered from the dust of long and silent centuries. There was the city complete in every detail save only one. The streets were there. The shops were there. The houses were there. The theatres were there. One thing alone was lacking. There was neither the sight of a living form, nor the sound of a living voice. It was a city, perfect in form and complete in appointment, but it had been dead for more than eighteen hundred years. My brothers, what of the city of our religious life? Is it indeed a religious life, or is it only something that was once alive, and has been long since dead? Is it only this that I have said, a splendidly articulated skeleton, a mausoleum of magnificent remains?

(2) Widen the sphere of illustration, and think of another temple, the temple of the world's social life. There is a temple of social life, and in that also there is not lacking a real relationship to God. In a deep, true sense it is a house of worship. We do well to insist upon that truth, although the need, perhaps, is not so great as it was some years ago. Society may have come to have a mean connotation in the minds of men, but it is none the less God's training-place for character. If it is in society that men and women seem sometimes to become their worst, it is only in society that they can become their best. It is only in social life, indeed, that we can truly become ourselves, for if the soul of man is purified in solitude, it comes to its perfection and fruition in the tumult of a crowd. The temple of the world's social life is in a real sense the House of God, and it, too, sadly needs a cleaning.

Time will permit me to do no more than look in one direction only for the suggestion of what is in my mind. There is in what we call society one index to its prevailing tendencies, an index more clear and more convincing than any other. I am thinking of the ordinance of Christian marriage, of what it ought to be, and of what it is in danger of becoming. What does it mean, I ask you, when slowly, but surely, the Christian ideal of marriage is being surrendered for something that is distinctly anti-Christian? God made marriage a sacred thing, a sacrament of deepest truth, the sign and symbol of the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church, the hallowed instrument for the carrying on of the long line of human life, a union of soul not less than it is a union of body. But what is man making marriage? Let me speak very plainly. Instead of a union between one man and one woman, indissoluble save only by death, something little better than a merely temporary contract; instead of the sacred instrument for the procreation of children, the means by which under the seal and sanction of society men may satisfy their carnal appetites; instead of a great solemn doorway into the mysteries of parenthood, an unhindered opportunity for licentiousness and lust; instead of a reverend coming together of husband and wife in the expectation and hope of children, the deliberate and selfish refusal to accept the