

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

OCTAVE OF EPIPHANY

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW

"When Jesus was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast, and having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and His parents knew not." (Luke II, 42.)

"When Jesus was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast." Who will not be struck with admiration for the Holy Family when reading these lines in the Gospel? Jesus, the new Law-giver, the very Son of God, equal to His Father in all things, obeys His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, and goes to Jerusalem to celebrate the accustomed feast of the season. Soon new feasts would be celebrated, but He had not as yet abolished the customs and ceremonies of the Old Law, and so long as it existed, it was to be obeyed. He was not bound by any law, but as His Father had ordained, at the present time He wished His parents to act and Himself to obey. There is more in this instance of our Divine Lord's actions than the world of today is wont to follow. Here is an exemplification of absolute obedience to a fulfillment of God's law; the world would like to obey as it pleases and fulfil if it pleases. The spirit of regard for God's commands and subjection to them is not as reverential as it should be, save among a very limited class. If we consider the scene laid before us in this Gospel and the ordinary behavior of this generation, we cannot help noticing the amazing contrast.

The lesson taught us by the Holy Family should be learned in its entirety. We, as Catholics, above all the rest of the world, still retain a great reverence for God's law and a more or less conscientious obligation to fulfil it in every minute particular. Some may be swayed a little by the spirit around them, but they are not a majority. The most delicate regard for God's law and the purest conception of its obligations exist among the true members of Christ's Church; but, in the midst of customary practices and beliefs, one must be strong in order to be faithful to convictions and prompt in duty. A study must be made of God's law, to some extent at least, and ceaseless prayer for perseverance, and ascend to Him who gives the faith to believe and the grace to live accordingly.

The world has come to consider that wherever a reform is needed, a change is required in practically every particular. As a rule this is true of any work of man that has deteriorated or run into a dead end. The works of man are necessarily fallible and imperfect. He has but limited intelligence and power, and can as a consequence attain but limited perfection, even in the greatest and best of his accomplishments and institutions. When there comes failure, as is often the case, his successors consider him to have made a mistake, and their method of reform is to destroy the original and to substitute something new. Men have endeavored to extend this method to the works and laws of God, and, of course, have erred. We must always bear in mind that God's works are perfect—man can not improve them in any respect whatsoever. God, in His infinite intelligence and with power absolutely unlimited, does what is best in the best way. When it appears that His works are decaying—or His laws unsuited—it should be only a sounding note that man is failing in his obedience to God's eternal decrees and is losing respect for them and is losing the right conception of God and His work.

When a difficulty as regards the fulfilment of God's law seems to exist, we must conclude that disorder man is to blame, and not that the Maker's commands no longer are suited to the world. We do not speak of physical disability now, but of that worldly difficulty so many are accustomed to make capital of and use by saying that the world is not what it was formerly. Be that as it may, no change incompatible with God's establishments is lawful. His institution—the Church—must remain the same from the foundation to the first Pentecost, to its end on the last day of the world. If a reform ever were needed, it was not in the Church, nor in her practices and laws as given to her by God, but among the people claiming adherence to her, or standing afar from her and loudly denouncing her impracticability and her superstitious rites. They are like the Pharisees who claimed that Christ worked through the devil. How fortunate should man consider himself in having a Church that an inflexible unchanging God has established! What would we be if we had to submit to the ideas of man in matters of religion? What are the religions of man today but the products of disordered brains, or the results of violations of the sacred laws of charity? According to some modern opinions, any one may establish his own religion; but as a matter of fact, many do without any religion at all, as this course leaves them much freer.

There never will be unity in the world, or one religion among men, until all realize that God has established a Church which can never change, and never grow old. Her practices and laws are binding in conscience on all occasions and dur-

ing our entire lifetime. She will remain so, until God Himself changes her, which will never be. She can not be improved upon; our notions of reform regarding her and of her betterment are but signs of our pride and our unwillingness to subject ourselves to her. The example set us by the Holy Family is the one to follow. There should be no question of righteousness, no discussion of opportuneness, but willing obedience. If we do not obey, we shall be destroyed spiritually. As we must obey the legitimate demands of nature in order to live spiritually, so must we obey the demands of our Church in order to live and thrive spiritually. We need not expect to face God on judgment day and find His smile benign, if during life we have found fault with and disobeyed His laws as given us through His Church. Imagine our confusion in the realization that we had made a futile attempt to reform His Church, and had endeavored to change things after our own fancies, rather than conform to His immutable wishes. What we have, God has given us; consequently it is good. If it does not seem to us to be what it should be, let us conscientiously examine our own selves, and we shall find that it is we who are not what we should be.

A MODERN FOOL OF GOD

Myles Connolly in America

Those gentlemen who consider Christian mysticism a sentimental philosophy productive only of stupor or hysteria would do well to read the life of Charles de Foucauld, French nobleman, scholar, soldier and priest, who offered himself as a sacrifice in the Sahara for the conversion of the Mussulman, as adequately and sensibly told by M. René Bazin, and satisfactorily translated into English by Peter Keelan. (Charles de Foucauld, Hermit and Explorer, New York, Benziger Brothers, \$4.00.) This biography is not the story of a sentimentalist seeking to drown himself in fine feelings, or that of an emotionalist taking refuge in the easy latitude of obscure ideas. It is the story of the terrible practicality of the true mystic, a story of a man moving arduously toward God with a reason like a torch and a will like a sword.

Viscount Charles de Foucauld was a man of this century and, in every sense, a man of this world. As a French nobleman, an officer in the French army, a classmate at Sains, Cyr of such men as Generals Petain and Mazel, he moved in the first plane of his contemporaries. As an artist and scholar and, in young manhood, a Parisian, he became somewhat of an epicure and cultivated man-about-town. He was not very old when, as he says of himself, there was not a trace of the Faith left in his soul.

He served in Africa with his troops, and later, at risk of his life, disguised as a Jew, he made a difficult tour of Morocco. The records of this perilous trip, published in book form as Reconnaissance au Maroc, became the most complete authority on Morocco of the time. This work, unusual for its carefulness and tenacious attention to detail as well as for its information and courage, brought him fame as an intrepid explorer and a scholar. He was honored at home and complimented abroad.

At the age of thirty-six the Viscount was on the first step of what was predicted to be an extraordinary career. The success of a scientific explorer demanded daring, ingenuity, resourcefulness, scholarship, and enormous sound sense. Charles de Foucauld demonstrated that he had all these. The world awaited him with interest. Then, there happened one of those little things that may often mean so much. The explorer, while in Paris preparing for a second expedition, met the Abbé Huvelin, a curate at St. Augustine's, a young man of unusual sanctity, culture, and good judgment. He was immediately impressed by the character of the Abbé. A Faith that has such servants must have some virtue, he said to himself. The thought stayed with him.

One day he went to St. Augustine's to question the Abbé. He entered the confessional and, without kneeling down, said: "Abbé, I have come to ask you to instruct me." M. Huvelin looked at him. "Kneel down, confess to God; you will believe." "But I did not come for that." "Confess." He knelt down and made a confession of all his life. Then the Abbé asked him: "Are you fasting?" "Yes." "Go to Communion!" So Charles de Foucauld came back to the Faith. He did not talk of his conversion. There was no revivalist trumpeting about it. His life is silently remolded on the recovered ideal," writes his biographer. "In this renewal all is profound, discreet and simple."

There followed two years of work on his book, and fame on its publication. The second Christmas he spent in Nazareth. This white town with steep and winding streets on the flanks of Nebi-Sain, touched the penitent heart of Charles de Foucauld. It inspired him with an unquenchable love for the hidden life, and for obedience, the state of

voluntary humility. It re-echoed to him Abbé Huvelin's magnificent saying: "Our Lord took the last place in such a way that nobody can ever rob Him of it." So reports his biographer. To the Charles de Foucauld's life may be described as one long, unremitting effort to take the place next the last, beside His Lord.

From now on, M. le Vicomte Charles de Foucauld ceases to be a man of the world. The same will that drove him through the perils and hardships of his African priest-ations now drives him on to imitate the absolute obscurity and hidden life of His Lord. He seeks to imitate himself for the sake of his Master.

He became a novice with the Trappists, but even their rigid rule did not satisfy his desire for severity and solitude. He left for the Holy Land, where he devoted himself to the service of the Poor Clares of Nazareth and Jerusalem, living in a miserable outhouse, keeping mainly to the Trappist rule, doing chores and errands, and in every way, in the poverty of his meals, his dress, his manner, humiliating himself. Many American travelers in the Holy Land twenty-five years ago must have seen this French nobleman and explorer, "who dressed like a pauper, spoke and wrote like a scholar, and prayed like a saint." After three years of this life, he went to the Trappist monastery of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges where he studied for the priesthood and was eventually ordained.

For some time, Africa, the continent of his explorations, with its immense solitudes and its thousands of infidels, had been drawing his heart. Now that he was a priest, he yearned to go back to bring Jesus Christ to the Mussulman. After some difficulties, he obtained permission to go, and, in 1901, at the age of fifty, alone, this modern Father of the Desert pushed into the Sahara.

Father Foucauld did not become a proselytist. He did not harangue the Mussulman. He did not preach, he did not preach, except in that his desert life was of itself a magnificent sermon. His was the way of the mystic. "If I can do miracles of self-abasement and devotion for Jesus," he says, "then Jesus will do miracles of conversion for me. He lived a life of privation and hardship, in absolute poverty, with his two meals of a bowl of rice or a few figs a day, with his scant, broken sleep, his long journeys back and forth over the desert, always on foot, disdaining the camel by his side, plodding along mile after mile in rags that left him an easy victim of the heat of the sun and the cold of the night, or stopping for hermitage in a crude hut for hermitage with his time spent almost entirely, asleep or awake, at the foot of the altar. Thus, this French nobleman and scholar, now a solitary priest in a parish some 1,250 miles long and 625 miles wide with 100,000 souls, for fifteen years slowly immolated himself for love of God, and the conversion of the infidel. In 1916, during the disturbances of the Great War, he was slain by desert assassins outside his retreat, from which he was lured by the treachery of a native he had often befriended.

That, briefly, is the sketch of his extraordinary career. The whole story is admirably told by M. Bazin. Saintly men have often been unfortunate in their biographers. But not Charles de Foucauld. M. Bazin sees into the great sanity of men of holiness. Saints are never fanatics, and are usually men of good worldly as well as heavenly sense. Victims of minor piety are fanatics, and it is they who hang on to the saints and who, too often, alas, write their lives. It is too true of all men that their humor and good sense die with them while their eccentric traits live on. In the lives of saints, these eccentricities are very often held up, unrelieved, and we are forced to look upon the picture of a man who is neither of earth or heaven.

M. Bazin's record is made in a very scientific and sensible manner. There is an abundance of fact and little of fancy. The result is that we see Father Foucauld as he really was: scientist, philologist, soldier, gentleman, a man of measurements and details, of lines and facts and dates and names, a practical man to the last, compiler of lexicons between devotions, translator of the Gospels into desert tongues while on hazardous journeys. We see a man who is the companion of military strategists; indeed, a strategist himself as his correspondence with several of the French generals on the Western Front reveals, a man who has left France some shrewd advice on the successful rule of her colonies.

Yet, in his own work, Father Foucauld could point to no signs of success. In his fifteen hard years in the desert, he converted only one person, a poor, old mulatto woman. He baptized two little white children before death and a youth already converted by a French army sergeant. Many of those among the natives whom he loved most and did most for turned on him. They kissed his hand, as their proverb advised, because they could not cut it off. He prayed for some help to come to sacrifice with him, but only one came and he did not stay. At times the apparent futility of his work struck him and he would cry in anguish at the unworthiness of his sacrifice that achieved so

little. He prayed, he worked, he loved, and saw nothing arise from his sacrifice. He begged for martyrdom, and even martyrdom, in the strict sense of the word, was marauding ruffians. It is true, but only indirectly because of his Faith.

Those pragmatic gentlemen, already mentioned, who are hostile to mysticism, will look far in the life of Father Foucauld to find any trace of fanaticism. His life may have appeared futile, but it was never foolish. There was no hysteria about it. He would have told you, as well as St. John of the Cross, that "Virtue consists not in apprehensions and feelings about God, however sublime they may be, nor in any personal experiences of this kind; but, on the contrary, in that which is not matter of feeling at all—in great humility." It is interesting to note that even in his last years Father Foucauld was a man who could laugh. He told a French surgeon who was sent to him for advice (a not uncommon occurrence) about the power of laughter. "I, as you see," he said, "am always laughing, being very ugly teeth. Laughing puts the heart, which is talking to you in a good humor; it draws men closer together, allows them to understand each other better; it sometimes brightens up a gloomy character, it is a charity." One who acts and talks thus can hardly be a fanatic.

The story of Charles de Foucauld is largely a story of self-abasement, not passive, but active, with the incredible energy of the mystic who seeks to strip the soul of body even before death. It is possible, perhaps, only for a few souls, and in the eyes of the many it may appear folly. But who can say it is folly in the eyes of God? Charles de Foucauld is gone from the Sahara, and there is little left but his grave, the sand-covered ruins of his hermitage hut, and his lexicons and translations for those he hoped would come after him. But who can say that the sacrifice he made was in vain? If he has not sown seed in the Sahara, may he not have sown seed in the heart of God? He, too, was but a voice crying in the wilderness. But he, too, may be the precursor of the Lord.

LONGFELLOW IN EUROPE

Robert Senouart, in Catholic World

Longfellow was in Sweden in the summer of 1835 and has spoken of the white light which, like a silver clasp, united today and yesterday, and there is a memory of Sweden in his translation of Tegner; but for the rest his memory is almost altogether of Catholic scenes, of Bruges and its belfry, and of Bavarian Nuremberg, of Wurtzburg's towers, which were called "Walter von der Vogelweid," whose statue is at Bozen in the Tyrol. But, most of all, his thoughts return to Italy, which had not the beauty of the Tyrol within her borders in his time, yet was beautiful enough—that delightful land where season follows on season among the wildest and the fairest scenes of nature; where first law and government, and then culture, were built up for Europe and for the world; where, through unbroken centuries, the people have never wavered in their devotion to the Mother of God; where a city was chosen by God in His eternal councils to be the capital of His Church, and is sanctified today by the presence of the Vicar of Christ on earth as a metropolis for the faithful. In Italy the Faith is like the sun rising in the morning, hope looks vividly to the better promises of eternity, and a serene and radiant charity gives already to this world something of the graciousness which it will realize perfected in paradise.

In his assiduous study of the great masters of the arts in Europe, which takes him at one time to Spain and at another to Sweden or to Germany, there are two men who on the other are the borders of Florence, as they were then for the traffic which went between the North and Rome. And a knowledge of Tuscany makes Dante far more vivid.

But what is still more remarkable is the vigor with which Dante has written of the Church, as she was then and as she is today. There are the fervors of St. Francis and St. Dominic; the philosophy of St. Thomas; the Psalms and the Canticles in which the Church celebrates the prerogatives of Mary; the fight which she makes incessantly against schism and sin; and the weakness of human nature, which, even within her own army, keep on fascinating him and they are both Italians. One is Michelangelo, whose stupendous frescoes he had admired in the Sistine Chapel, and whose statuary he had seen elsewhere in Rome and Florence; Michelangelo, who himself wrote a succession of sonnets on art and eternity, and whose genius was haunted by the grim huge figures and the severe standards of the Old Testament, and who, in his brief life, remains, like Dante, one of the most tragic of the great geniuses. Longfellow's drama of Michelangelo is not as well known as it deserves to be; for it is not only a faithful picture of the great sculptor, but, as the Lays of Ancient Rome are vivid with scenes remembered by Macaulay, it is full of scenes of that which Longfellow remembered

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Longfellow's other great Italian was Dante. Now Dante finds his inspiration in two subjects which are intimately connected: the Church and Italy. He was busy, not only with the contemporaries he loved and hated, but with the scenes of Italy, and especially of Tuscany, scenes which are much the same in the thirteenth century as they are seven hundred years later. Still in the May evening, when the mosquitoes take the place of the flies, the herdman on the hillside sees the darting of the fire-flies; still Fiesole, with its mountain and its quarry, rises to the north of the Arno valley, still Galuzzo on the one side and Trespinio impede her in her fights; and, finally, the glorious end of faith, and hope, and charity in the eternal contemplation of the Blessed Trinity. There they were then, and there they are today, proof of the fact, always cogent, that Faith once and for all delivered to the saints; and changed in our day only by the spread of the Church around the full circle of the earth, by the yet more central place of Eucharistic worship, and the greater wisdom and sanctity of the successor of St. Peter. And this is the theme of Dante, this guides his observation, as with Virgil he makes his way through hell and purgatory, and with Beatrice through paradise.

MISSIONARY TELLS OF NEEDS OF CHINA

An interesting analysis of the school conditions in China is given by the Rev. George M. Stenz, S. V. D., who has labored as a missionary in China for thirty years. The League will ask its members to work on the missions and will organize lectures and press campaigns.

"Schools modeled upon our latest and most modern systems were introduced in China more than fifteen years ago," said Father Stenz. "Many schools of the old type, based purely upon Chinese ideas, still exist, but the new schools are increasing steadily in number. The law of compulsory education already is on the statute books, but it is not being enforced. This is not strange, for they have not the teachers to carry out the work. Then, too, the over enthusiastic devotees of the modern school system, carrying their fiery zeal to the extreme destroyed the good qualities, as well as the evils of the old schools. The ancient respect of parents was brushed aside, and the very idols of the gods were shattered into bits or cast into some nearby pond. These things, which I witnessed myself naturally angered the older people.

"Schools, based upon modern methods, however, are being introduced everywhere. The Protestants have been wide awake to the opportunities afforded by this new era. At present they have 5,637 primary schools, 962 high schools, and 291 intermediate schools, with a total enrollment of 199,894 students. In addition they have 28 universities. In these matters the Catholics have been far behind. This is due partly to lack of men and means, partly to the doubt and distrust formerly entertained as to the success of modern methods among the Chinese. We now realize these doubts and fears were groundless. We should have used all the men and means then at our disposal, sent though they were. Now it is far too late, and what makes the outlook for the

future still more disheartening is the fact that all the text books are saturated with atheistic and Protestant colorings, and it will now mean a tremendous struggle to thoroughly purify them of these doctrines. The Protestants also have affiliated with them a number of prominent Chinese who were educated abroad, either in Europe or America. The Catholics have none.

"To counteract this, I determined in 1908 to start a foundation of an intermediate school in an old Chinese house, but soon had to move to a larger one. I earned the money necessary, as there was no such thing as aims for the school. I secured the funds by writing books and doing odd jobs for Catholic foreigners for which they paid me. In this way, by 1914, I had enough to erect a large building. The first enrollment soon mounted to 180 students, and up to the present time more than 4,600 graduates have gone forth. Many of these I assisted to get prominent positions. Now, a number attend the universities. The Chinese Government has recognized the school and the students receive their diplomas and credits from Peking.

"By this means I also have been able to baptize more than seventy persons coming from the most highly respected families. One young man of seventeen, of very rich and respected ancestors, converted to Christianity within a few years practically his entire family, his mother, sisters, brothers and their wives. At present students come from five different provinces, so the school accommodations again are too small. It must be enlarged and a number of others built and among these must be an up to date technical school. This means more men and means.

DANGERS TO BE AVOIDED

"One often hears that the Chinese are slow of comprehension and averse to the introduction and study of modern sciences. That is not true, for we find them not only men of talent, but some of them real geniuses. One thing, however, is all important. If these people are to be educated at all, they must receive a good, solid, Christian education. Otherwise, we are spending our lives only to rear another and far worse generation of pagans. Even now there is creeping in a spirit of dislike and hostility to foreigners. The Chinese youths should become acquainted with all the facts of modern science which other nations have discovered and perfected, but they must above all lay the foundation of all their knowledge upon the one and only true basis which will prevent the superstructure from toppling over and crushing them, and this is the firm and immovable rock of Christianity."

FRENCH WOMEN TO AID FOREIGN MISSIONS

A Congress has been held in Paris by the delegates of the various women's organizations who are disposed to come to the aid of the Catholic missions throughout the world.

At the session devoted to the work of young people's organizations, it was decided that more sewing should be done by these organizations on behalf of the missions and that in the girls clubs and "patronages" the work should be encouraged by means of talks and lectures. Christian educational establishments will be requested to direct the attention of their students to the work of the missionaries, particularly in the teaching of geography and history.

Similar resolutions were passed in the name of the Ligue Patriotique des Françaises, which has a membership of 500,000 Catholic women. The League will ask its members to work for the missions and will organize lectures and press campaigns.

The League later adopted the suggestion of a religious from Cameroon, presented to the Congress by the Archbishop of Carie, Mgr. Le Roy, asking the Catholic women of France to undertake a crusade in behalf of their Sisters of the dark continent who are still oppressed by slavery and polygamy. Madame de Gourmier, vice president of the Apostolic Society, reported that that association had created 15 needle-rooms in Paris and 52 in the provinces. These needle-rooms supply not only the rectories and the sacrifices of the missions, but are radiating centers of the missionary spirit. The Apostolic Society has distributed already more than a million objects to the Missions and has spent 17,000,000 francs for them.

At the closing session of the Congress, in the presence of Cardinal Dubois, M. Georges Goyau, member of the French Academy, delivered a remarkable address on the great Frenchwomen who had helped the Missions in the past; Mademoiselle de Guercheville, who opened the road to Canada to the Society of Jesus; the Duchess d'Aiguillon, who helped the sicklepickers in their leprosiariums; the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny; the Sisters of Charity and the Religious of Saint Paul of Chartres.

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