

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DESOUY, D. D.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"I am the good shepherd." (John x, 11.)

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ designates Himself by the term of "shepherd," adding to it the qualifying word "good." We know the life of the shepherd. He clothes himself in the coarsest of attire. His food is very often of the poorest and the most common. Nay, he sometimes passes long hours without any food save a few pieces of bread. He, however, loves his flock. His work seems to be fascinating, for, notwithstanding all the difficulties attached to it, the shepherd performs it faithfully. He is out in the forest or on the plain even during the most inclement weather. Be it summer, with the searching rays of the sun beating down upon the earth; be it winter, with its cold blizzards—he is ever with his sheep. He watches them as they travel over hill and dale in their search for food. Never do their wanderings tire him nor exhaust his patience. He loves his flock and, as we know, where there is love there is no work too difficult. What more beautiful figure could Our Lord have chosen in order clearly to demonstrate His love for us, His sufferings undergone for us, His anxiety for our safety, and His great care exercised in our behalf!

That He loves us is evident. Through His grace alone, have we not been enrolled among the members of His flock? Because of His love for us, have we not been able to receive His body and blood to nourish and strengthen our spiritual life? Because of His love for us, have we not at our disposal the sacred tribunal wherein we can have our sins washed away? Because of His love for us, have we not men chosen by Him to administer to us in our spiritual needs? What has He left undone in order to show His love for us? Nothing. Indeed! All He requires of us is a faithful correspondence with His grace. We are not dumb animals, like the sheep over which the earthly shepherd watches; but we are rational beings, gifted with a free will by which we should govern our acts. He commands and invites us, thereby regulating and aiding our free will lest we abuse it. He supplies us with the food wherewith we maintain life. He is more a shepherd than is contained in our conception of that word, for He does not accompany us so much in our search for food, but He dispenses it to us and invites us to come and partake of it.

Certainly, no shepherd ever has shown a love for his flock similar to the love that Christ shows for us. And why? Is it that He is enriched by possessing us, as the shepherd is by his flock? Far from it. It is merely His love for us—true love—He wishes us to share in His happiness, to reign in His kingdom.

We need not comment upon His sufferings. The holy season set aside by the Church for commemorating His sufferings has just passed; and the memories of these same sufferings, which the Church recalled to you, undoubtedly are still fresh in your minds. We have already mentioned some of the hardships undergone by the shepherd. Can they be compared to those that Christ suffered for us? He proclaimed that He would go, but He would not leave us orphans. He would ascend to our Father and to His Father—but He would send upon us the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, and abide with us forever. He left His representative to watch over His flock. Did He not say to Peter: "Feed My lambs. Feed My sheep?" His flock remains and increases—and, above all, is well cared for. He imparts upon His shepherd the obligation of inviting and drawing other members into His fold. He knew that outside His flock there would be no unity. He requires one fold, as there is but one shepherd. He who remains outside the fold and even faithfully endeavors to do His will, will work in vain unless He be ignorant of this true fold. Yes, Christ cares for His fold, but His fold alone. There is no sure room for all within it. Does He really protect His flock? Indeed, He exercises over it the watchfulness of the most vigilant shepherd, the tenderest father, the kindest friend. I know Mine, and Mine know Me." He is our way, our truth, and our life. "In Him we live and move and are." So much solitude has He for us that we are never separated from Him unless we ourselves cause it.

Dear friends, we belong to Christ's flock. "I," He says, "have chosen you!" With so good a Shepherd at our head, what should our sentiments and our actions be? He is not a shepherd that drives us over hill, through forest, across plains and valleys. His word, as you have seen, is not a word of harshness. His commands are not expressed in tones of bitterness and haughtiness. He rather leads us with a gentle hand, "Come, follow Me. My yoke is sweet and My burden light. As I have done

before you, proportionately do you after Me. I will not lead you to the slaughter as I have been led. Your sufferings shall be much lighter. The reward I now possess and enjoy, you who follow Me will enjoy along with Me when the days of your life in the flock of the world will be ended."

Who can resist following the invitations of such a Shepherd? We are already in His fold. It is now our duty to render ourselves good members of His flock. If we neglect to do so, we are indeed ungrateful in the basest degree, and truly deserve the punishment destined for those who abuse their liberty and reject the graces Christ offers them, without any merit on their part.

GENERAL INTENTION FOR MAY

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.

CONFIDENCE IN OUR LADY

We read in the Third Book of Kings that when Adonias sought a favor he went to the mother of Solomon and asked her to intercede for him with her royal son. "Then Bathsheba came to the king to speak to him for Adonias; and the king arose to meet her, and bowed to her, and sat down upon his throne. And the throne was set for the king's mother, and she sat at his right hand. And she said to him: 'I desire one small petition from thee: Do not put me to confusion.' And the king said to her: 'My mother, ask; for I must not turn away thy face.'"

Commentators apply this touching passage to our Blessed Lady, the Mother of our Heavenly King, who is seated on her throne in bliss beside Him, continually occupied in asking favors for her devoted children on earth. As in the times of the Old Testament a king's mother was a powerful intercessor, so likewise under the New Law Mary's adopted children know that her intercessory power with her Son in heaven is never invoked in vain. Clients of Mary need not be reminded that she is a generous mother to those who love her, and their confidence in her should be complete.

However, if there are people who seek for motives why confidence should be placed in the motherly care and affection of Mary, they have only to consult the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and of others who have distinguished themselves in her service. The testimony of those personages may be summed up in a few words. They tell us everywhere that, as we have recourse to our Divine Lord, as our great Advocate of redemption and conciliation with the Eternal Father, so likewise should we have recourse to Mary as our advocate and mediatrix of intercession with her Divine Son. This recourse must be agreeable to our Lord, for loving her with so tender a love He must be pleased with the love we render her in turning to her in this manner. And He must on that account be more inclined to listen to the prayers we offer Him through her than if we were to approach Him by ourselves alone.

Mary's place in heaven is above the angels and all other blessed spirits. If we honor these inhabitants of heaven we should honor still more and confide in her. If the Blessed in heaven, by God's appointment and through their intercession, render signal services to us in the way of our salvation, how much greater must be the service Mary is able to render us, and consequently how much more readily and more confidently should we turn to her who is the Queen of Angels and Sovereign Lady of the Universe.

The endearing names given to Mary in her litany reveal sufficiently the confidence which her clients should repose in her. "Refuge of Sinners," "Health of the Sick," "Consoler of the Afflicted," "Help of Christians" etc., are titles which have their own stories to tell and which should encourage all who have yet to learn by experience what a loving and powerful intercessor is the Mother of the Heavenly King. Those titles reveal the ways Mary displays her sentiments: A mother consoling her children when they are in affliction; a merciful mother; a mother protecting her own in danger; a mother always and everywhere doing all that motherhood can do in love and care and service.

At the marriage feast in Cana, Mary took practical account of the troubles and wants of her friends in mere temporal matters and used her intercessory power with her Divine Son to have them supplied; how much more willingly will she intercede for those appealing to her for help in the more important affairs of the soul. A poor shipwrecked sailor, grasping a plank on the ocean surface, feels hope rising in his bosom when he spies a dim light on the coast and he makes heroic efforts to reach it, for there he is confident of rescue. In like manner, weak, sin-laden souls tossed on the ocean of life and exposed to the storms of passion and adversity, rejoice when Mary the Star of Hope is proposed to them as a guiding light. She is their hope, and she will be their salvation, if they show their confidence in her.

These were the sentiments of the saints in her regard, as we gather from their lives and writings.

Saint Bernard, to cite but one instance, tells us to keep our eyes fixed on this Star of Hope. "If the winds of temptation rise, if the rocks of tribulation frown, look to the Star, call upon Mary. If you are tossed about by the waves of pride, ambition, distraction, envy, look to the Star, call upon Mary. If anger or avarice or sins of the flesh threaten your soul, look towards Mary. In danger, in distress, in despondency in perplexity, think of Mary. Let that holy name be ever on your lips and in your heart. If you follow her guidance, you cannot stray; if you pray to her, you will not despair; when she holds your hand, you will not fall; if she protects you, you need not fear; if she leads you, you need not grow weary; if she befriends you, you will be safe."

What stronger motive could we have to urge us to have confidence, in the sweet Mother whom God has given us to guide us gently and surely through life to the port of heaven? But in order to earn her protection, is it too much to ask that we should show ourselves worthy children? If we desire her efficacious intercession, we should make an effort to lead sinless lives, avoiding every occasion that might endanger our souls and practising the virtues which she loved and practised. This is what the saints did and in doing so earned her good will and protection. We should endeavor to imitate the saints, and following their example, cherish in our hearts great hope and confidence in the Mother of God by frequently reminding ourselves of our weaknesses and of the necessity of invoking her assistance. Show our generosity in trying to please her; make little sacrifices daily and practise devotions in her honor in a way which will keep her memory fresh in our minds and hearts; for instance, the constant wearing of the scapular, the daily recitation of the rosary, as members of the League of the Sacred Heart the daily decade, Holy Communion on her feast days, frequent invocation of her name, and last but not least, meditation on her virtues, all salutary practices which will draw her nearer to us.

"Not only does our Blessed Lady watch over our spiritual and material interests," says a recent writer, "but she also obtains for us that habitual light and strength by which we are enabled to travel steadily towards our true home in heaven, guided by that spirit of wisdom and prudence which distinguishes her faithful followers from the foolish children of the world."

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

A PROTESTANT STORY

Finding in the Bulwark for January, a Protestant organ, the statement that a whole village in Italy had become Protestant in a body, we communicated with our Roman correspondent and have received from him the following account of the affair: "A certain statement appearing in the Bulwark of January should not go by unchallenged. It runs thus: 'A few weeks ago a whole village in Italy turned Protestant in a body and they sacked the priest and sent for a Protestant minister to come and conduct Protestant services for them in the former Catholic Church.'

Obviously, the paper refers to the following fact, which took place in the autumn in a small village of Piedmont. There the vast majority of the population of the small hamlet—so small that one of the most popular dailies of Milan, referring to it, said that very few Italians themselves had ever heard of it—had a dispute with the priest, not—and this should be well borne in mind—over some point of doctrine, but because the priest refused to carry out some little detail connected with the procession and celebration of the patron saint of the village, which detail had been carried out year after year. Those who are familiar with the country districts of Italy well know what devotion there is to the patron saint of the village, and how the people look forward to every detail of the procession, the frework display, etc. A subject of much comment and laughter there was when the stalwart sons of this unknown village addressed themselves to a Protestant pastor, not of the High Church sort, but of Calvinistic tenets, and asked him to come, just because he was in opposition to the priest. The good souls did not know on what doctrinal grounds.

"Well, there would be only one conclusion. The pastor, after a few remarks, realized there was 'nothing doing' and the people of the hamlet realized after their hot Italian spirit had calmed down, that with the priest a detail would be omitted, whilst with the minister there would be no procession at all, and the good old saint of their village would be cast away from them. The hamlet now pursues its ordinary normal life without any sign of schism, and the Protestant pastor has come back to his own. If such are the great captures of Protestantism, the less said the better. An Italian is impulsive, but he soon returns to the realms of reason. Protestantism, and especially that of the lower forms, has no chance of making progress here. It is too prosaic and too narrow-minded for him."—The Universe, (London.)



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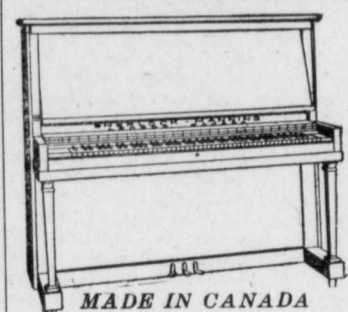
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