

FIVE MINUTE SERMON TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE DUTY OF SERVING GOD

Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. (Mat. xxii. 21)

The story is told of a thief who stole treasures from a Roman temple and who was delivered up to justice by a dog. This watch dog pursued the thief with persistence until it aroused the attention of people; the thief was discovered and the thief punished. We all possess such a persistent betrayer within us. It is our conscience which bids us to do good and warns us against doing wrong, and persistently follows with its betraying voice the commission of grave sins. Our conscience retains within us: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Give back the good name, the property that you have taken from others! Return to God the things of which you have deprived Him, namely honor and obedience, which you have violated by committing sin. Thus our conscience pursues us until we become reconciled with God. The honor and obedience due to God—in other words, the service of God—shall occupy our attention to-day, in connection with the divine command contained in the words of today's gospel: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

"Render to God the things that are God's" means: Render to God the service due Him. He is the Creator and you are His creatures; He is the Master, and you are His subjects. We could not create ourselves, nor anything we have. Body, soul, life and death, everything we possess, we have received from God. Understanding, free will, ability and strength, all this and all else is from God. The most precious gift, however, that we have received from Him, is our immortal soul, created after the image of God. Our soul, therefore, is also God's creation and property, and we are in duty bound to serve Him with this soul, to render this soul to Him. God did not only create us and bestowed upon us all our faculties of body and soul. He came to our rescue, when we had fallen away from Him, and He sent His only begotten Son to redeem us. Therefore, the Lord says: "This people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise." (Is. xlii. 21)

How, then, must we serve God as in duty bound? We serve God when we honor and fear Him, when we keep His commandments and avoid sin. Fear God and keep His commandments. That is all that God demands from us. Whosoever cometh into the service of sin can be a servant of God. Only those who serve Him in all things can be called His servants. The sinner is servant not to God, but to his vices and passions; he has not one master, but many, for as many vices as he possesses, so many masters must he have.

It is proper, then, to ask ourselves if we are in duty bound to serve God as in duty bound? Do not our sins and sinful habits argue that Thou art no servant of God, thou servest us? O, what a disaster this would be! Heaven and earth serve God and so does the universe," exclaims St. Jerome, "and man refuses." Yes, man so often despises the service of the Lord and Creator and becomes a slave to his flesh, to mammon or to his ambitions? He leaves the service of his rightful Master and enters the service of his worst enemy, the evil spirit. A soldier who turns traitor is punished with death. What better does a soul deserve than that he should be loyal to his rightful Master, deserts Him and enters the ranks of the enemy? "And that servant," says the Saviour, "who knoweth the will of his Lord, and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke xii. 47). "And shall be cast as an unfaithful servant into eternal destruction."

Let us, therefore, renounce in future the unlawful and degrading service of sin; let us cease to serve the world, the flesh and the devil; let us serve the only true God with all our power and strength. Let us often put the question ourselves: "Whose image and inscription is this? Whose image of God is upon my soul? And since our faith answers: "You bear the image of God upon your soul, you are God's possession," then we must acknowledge that we are in duty bound to love, to adore and to serve God alone and with all our strength! Amen.

IMPROPER CONVERSATION

It is a well-known fact that certain snakes have poisonous fangs. Were beside the unhappy traveler in the forest who is bitten by one of them! The poison circulates in his blood, the wounded member swells up, fever sets in and not infrequently death follows. The Psalmist speaks of the poison of snakes and the venom of asps and indicates that a similar poison may flow from the mouth of man: "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; the venom of asps is under their lips." This poison is the wicked words and the foul language which proceed from the mouths of some. As the poison of snakes injures the body, so and in a greater degree evil conversations injure the soul of man. To these the Apostle refers when he says: "The tongue is indeed a little member, and prepared not great things. Behold how small a fire kindleth a great wood" (James iii. 5). Impure conversation kindles a great fire, laying waste both the soul of him that speaks and of him that listens. Impure language is a disease to the home who utters it on account of the source from which it comes. It proceeds from an ill-regulated heart. Who, as a rule, are they that indulge in this kind of language? Still they young men that do not weigh their words, who think themselves smart in speaking of such subjects. Or they are frivolous men whose age has not yet taught them the gravity due to good manners or good morals. They think they cannot laugh unless there be scurrility and impurity in their conversation.

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Impure language arises from an impure heart. Have you ever met with a single modest and well-behaved young man who indulged in impure language? Surely youths, such as St. Aloysius and St. Stanislaus, actually swooned away if anything unbecomingly coarse was said in their presence, such as the sensuality of their pure souls. Our Lord says: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Luke vi. 45). "From the heart come forth evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications," (Mat. xv. 19) The axion of St. Chrysostom was: "As the heart, so the words," St. Bernard tells us: "The tongue is often revealed by the testimony of speech, because the tongue expresses that of which the heart is full. Impure conversation is the index to an impure heart. Such a heart is like a source from which evil words arise like a poisonous exhalation."

The subject of impure conversation is one which everyone ought to be ashamed, for it is impurity. Impurity brings the curse of God upon those that practice it. The man who talks in a filthy manner proclaims his own shame by showing that he delights in what is low and degrading. Moreover, the subject of impure conversation is one that gives great scandal. Unmodest words fall like red-hot sparks into the soul of the listener and cause it to burn with a great flame. It is an incitement to sin. To lead others into sin is a shameful and heinous deed, which our Lord condemned in the strongest terms: "Whoever leads a dog into the snare of the word because of scandals, he must needs be that scandals come; nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." (Mat. xviii. 7) St. Augustine reproaches himself and calls down the condemnation of God upon his head. Shame upon him who prostitutes his lips by uttering such language!

The instrument used in uttering words that are unbecoming is the tongue. God gave us speech to praise Him, and the unclean man abuses it for filthy language. "Let no evil proceed from your mouth, but that which is good, that it may minister grace to hearers." (Ephes. iv. 29). He who talks in an unmodest manner frustrates the purpose for which God gave him the tongue; he employs it for a purpose directly opposed to that for which it was made. The tongue is a member on which we receive the Body of Christ, and the evil speaker defiles it with impurity. No other member is allowed to touch the Sacred Host than the tongue; as often as we receive the Body of our Lord the tongue becomes for a few moments the throne of His Majesty. Thus the tongue is sanctified. By uttering filthy words it is desecrated in the most shameful manner. "How shameful a thing it is," exclaims St. Chrysostom, "that the tongue the noble member, the tongue which has often touched the Body of Christ, which has been moistened with the Blood of the Lord, should be misused as a vile purpose! It is right and fitting that a speech or a song that outrages decency should proceed out of the mouth of a Christian, the same mouth which has so often received the Body of the Lord? He who speaks in decency disgraces himself and defiles the tongue which has been sanctified by contact with God.—Rev. Joseph Schmitt.

Let us live early in our Lord and for our Lord, and let us not frighten ourselves about death. I do not say let us not fear it at all, but I say let us not die unprepared. Shall we not be blessed if we die with our gentle Saviour in the midst of our hearts?

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CLERICAL JESTS

GRAVE AND LEARNED PRIESTS WHO FOUND KEEN DELIGHT IN INNOCENT HUMOR

"Holy men have considered humor to have a high place in the ethics of life," says the Ecclesiastical Review, which is only another way of saying that the well-known fact that most clergymen of whatever faith, like a joke as well as the next man.

There was Nicholas Burke, for instance, better known as Father Thomas Burke, the great Irish patriot and preacher. Father Tom had a great fondness for riding on top of an omnibus. Once when going so after a long church service in Dublin he produced his breviary and was so deep in its contents. A well-known evangelical sitting nearby took upon himself to comment upon the act. "The Lord tells us," he says, "that when we pray we should not be as the hypocrites, who love to pray in public and at the corners of streets, that they may be seen by men. Now," he added, "when I pray I enter into my closet and when I have shut the door I pray in secret."

Without looking up, Father Burke replied aloud: "Yes; and then you get on the top of an omnibus and tell every one all about it."

Once when Father Burke was going to Cork he met in a crowded railway carriage a man who, repeatedly slipping his hand into an inside pocket of his coat and drawing out a bottle, went on drinking drams, which made the father very angry. He was so deep in his fear that he might soon become unpleasant company.

The next time the man took out the bottle Father Tom dryly remarked: "Your mother must have died very early, sir?" The man gasped in surprise. The priest continued: "It is quite plain you were brought up on the bottle." As all present laughed, the man, feeling ashamed, put the bottle by and left in unbecoming haste.

A convert lady who hoped that he would write her in the style and length of his sermons, inquired of him what she should do to become truly religious. The reply was: "Pray, my dear, as you are as humble as a door mat and as pliable as a plate of porridge."

Among the clerical humorists of Ireland Father James Healy stands out prominently. Once Father Healy was asked how he would describe a Scotsman, and in answer, as usual, he spoke the Scots accent, said: "A Scot is a man who keeps the Sabbath and everything else than he can get."

Father Healy, a thoroughly temperate man, on one occasion ordered a humorous cabman at Bray, known to indulge in an occasional drop, to call for him at a dinner at the house of a friend. On the journey's arrival Father Healy was grieved to notice that he was not quite sober. "Drank again, Peter," muttered the priest, "Well, to tell you the truth, your reverence, I'm a little that way myself."

A barber, once in shaving the father, had a very trembling hand. "There, now," exclaimed Father Healy, "you have cut me. Oh, whiskey, whiskey!" The barber, who was in a state of nervousness, then, must ascend during this month in Catholic churches and families for this great and charitable intention. Western World.

DISCOURAGEMENT IN PRAYER

Sometimes we become discouraged about our prayers; it seems almost, perhaps, as though God had forgotten us, and our good angel had forsaken us. Let us see what encouraging things have been said about this in a "Dominican Mission Book and Manual of General Devotions" compiled by a Dominican Father. The introduction to this book is a plain little talk about prayer; and in it we find those helpful and encouraging words which apply to the great and trying difficulty which we meet with, now and then in our prayers.

"Sometimes it so happens that both the imagination and reason seem to be paralyzed, so that after faithfully trying to begin and to go on with the meditation for a little while the soul finds itself so stupid and dull as to be able to imagine or reason upon nothing. Let her not be discouraged. Let her make simple acts of the will, however hard and dry they may seem to be. Let her spend the time saying to God such things as: 'O my God, I love Thee. O my God, I offer my mind and body to Thee—take me! O my God, I give my will up to Thee—I submit to this dryness and dullness.'—And other such simple dry acts. There may be no sensible fervor in them, they may seem to be the soul perfectly stupid, yet such acts of the will, done at the same time with great calmness and interior stillness, without hurry or anxiety, will be of the greatest value to the soul and in the eyes of God. You will make more progress during that hour than in many others when the reason was bright and the affections came gushing forth like a fountain. But perhaps the heart may be so dull that even these simple acts can not be made without turmoil and disturbance of mind. In that case, remain quietly before God in perfect calmness, submitting yourself to His will in this trial. Occupy yourself simply in keeping peace."

PRAY FOR THE DEAD

The month of November is devoted by the Church in an especial manner to the souls in purgatory. This means, of course, that Catholic people are urged to offer up their prayers and good works for the benefit of the departed who may still be deprived of the Beatific Vision, because of the punishment which they have to undergo on account of their sins. The doctrine of purgatory is peculiar to Catholic Christianity, as with many other doctrines it was rejected by the sects after the death of Protestantism. "Purgatory," says our catechism, "is a middle state of souls suffering for a time on account of their sins." Those who die in mortal sin or without having fully expiated their grievous sins, although forgiven, are barred from heaven, or the sight of God, until such time as the eternal justice of God is satisfied. The scripture tells us that the last farthing must be paid by which we understand that our sins must be fully expiated and wiped away. "Nothing defiled can enter heaven" is another phrase in which we find scriptural authority for this doctrine. It is a most reasonable doctrine and full of consolation. In another place of the sacred text we read that "it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins." In the old law even prayers for the souls of the departed were offered up, as when King Machabeus offered that sacrifice by the repose of the souls of those who were slain in battle. It is the duty of Catholics, therefore, to remember those who have gone before and who may still be unable to enter the joys of heaven. We all believe in this consoling doctrine of purgatory and most of us have friends suffering and hasten the time of their deliverance from pain and their entrance into their everlasting rest. The souls in purgatory are the friends of God and belong to what is called the communion of saints. They are holy people, saints who are destined for the happiness of heaven, but for a while they are barred because of their sins

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and faults during their lives upon earth. Their condition appeals to all who have faith and charity. In turn they are able to aid the living by their prayers of intercession in our behalf. If we forget them in their time of need we may ourselves be forgotten and neglected when we go to purgatory. Innumerable Masses and frequent and fervent prayers, then, must ascend during this month in Catholic churches and families for this great and charitable intention. Western World.

How consoling is this advice! Let us carry a little farther the teaching on tranquility, peace, calmness. It reads as follows, in plain, simple words: "Another thing is, to make all your spiritual exercises, daily or otherwise, whatever manner of prayer you may be using, with the greatest peace, calmness, and stillness of heart. There is nothing worse in prayer than anxiety, fear, restlessness, hurry, over eagerness to do it right, or any overstraining of the soul. All should be done with the greatest calmness, stillness, peace and tranquility possible. The loss of that interior calmness disturbs recollection, distracts the attention, and hinders the workings of the Holy Spirit. So that, if your tranquility is disturbed, you must endeavor by a means to restore it before you go farther, even though the whole time of your prayer be occupied in doing this."

There is much food for thought in these simple words.—Sacred Heart Review.

WORK WORTH PRAISING

Among the societies of Catholic young men that are doing something more practical than running whist parties, minstrel shows, and moonlight dances is the Young Men's Catholic Association of Boston. The program of the fall and winter's work of this excellent association has just come to our desk, and it evidences such a desire to better the young men intellectually that we take great pleasure in helping to make it public. The evening classes at the Association rooms for the coming season include a weekly class in Catholic philosophy—a course of lectures that will explain simply and adequately the principles and system of Catholic Philosophy. The problems of the world's origin, of life, of man's soul, of the nature of thought and of the functions of the will, of the existence and nature of God, of man's ethical relations, will all be fully dealt with. In view of the necessity, so often dwelt upon in the Review, of a greater knowledge among our young men of social problems, we are glad to see in the Association's program a course in Social Studies. Lectures on these subjects will be given once a month by men who have made a thorough study of modern economic conditions in their bearing on the social and religious life of the community. This course will be

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