

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE PROPER USE OF WEALTH

"And I say to you: Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity, that when you shall fall, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings." Luke xvii, 34.

It is human to wish to receive some recompense for our acts; it is human also to do many things because some reward will come to us. It is only reasonable, too, that recompense be made to us, but it is not necessarily just that the reward we may expect come to us for our actions. God's tells us that good deeds will receive recognition from Him and that they will be rewarded by Him. But this reward is only the one He has planned for us; it is not always the one for which we may wish at the time. Whatever reward God has decreed shall come to mortals for their works we may feel sure to be a just one. It is a manifestation of His goodness, justice, and wisdom. Hence we shall have a purer intention in our works if we always do them without indicating what reward we expect from them, but willingly surrender our wish to God's good will.

This does not mean that we should not order our works to some definite end, but it simply implies, if our wish be not God's desire, we are ready to submit to His will and be content with the reward He will give us, which, coming as it does from Him, must be the right and just one.

There is, however, a reward which we can with certainty expect to come from God, if we perform the acts He demands as a condition for granting it. Humanly speaking, we say we gain this reward, as if it were in our power to gain it. The truth is, however, that this reward is far above the merits of our works considered in themselves. We can merit it, but only with God's grace. He demands of us certain conditions, certain acts—in a word, one kind of life—which, if we labor sincerely to offer to Him, He will purify, strengthen, and elevate by His grace, and thus make us fit for the reward He wishes to give for our faithfulness.

What is this reward? It is eternal life. Are we free to labor for it or not? Morally speaking, we must labor to acquire it. If we do not, we will not simply miss gaining a reward, but we will render ourselves deserving of punishment. But, after all, is this reward forced upon us? It is not. If we take the true view of life, we shall see that it exactly corresponds with the rational demands of our nature. We all desire happiness. But this craving we certainly can not satisfy in this world. There is here no pleasure so unalloyed, so lasting, so intense, as to satisfy our hearts. Hence we should feel grateful in the highest degree possible for the one reward that will satisfy us entirely, even though God has placed conditions for the gaining of it. This happiness was given to man first not as a recompense, but as an altogether free gift. There was one little condition placed for the retaining of it, which man failed to fulfil, and God then demanded of him and his posterity that they labor for this reward, and undergo suffering and death before gaining it. This punishment God in His wisdom decreed to be due man because of his unfaithfulness to Him, but God did not decree that man should suffer only; he would suffer for a time, but would merit a future of everlasting joy.

The means for gaining this certain reward are belief in God and service given to Him. In life there are many things that help us in this service, and also many that would seem to constitute an impediment to it. But it is within our power, aided by God's grace, to turn everything in our lives toward the end intended for us. The words of the text, taken from the Gospel of the parable of the unjust steward, indicate to us one of the things that, in a great number of people, constitutes an impediment to eternal life. The Gospel speaks of riches and calls them the "mammon of iniquity." It is not necessary to say that greed for money has drawn many from the service of the Lord, and has kept others from entering His service. The rich have often been repudiated in the Gospels, because they allowed their goods to set them on the road leading to perdition.

But, as with all gifts of nature, the sin is in the abuse, not in the right use. Christ did not, nor would He ever, condemn the rich who make good use of their wealth. St. Luke voices Christ's will in regard to one way in which riches can be used rightly and efficaciously when he says: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity." In other words, use your riches for the good of the needy, the deserving, the widows, the orphans, all classes of the poor. "When you fail," that is when the end of your days arrives, if not before, they will help you; they will pray for you; they will bless you before God—and will not all this serve you? How can you doubt it, if God has assured you that even a cup of water given in His name will not go unrewarded? And will not these be witnesses to your charity?

How many orphans you can help—you who have plenty of this world's goods! How many poor and afflicted you can provide for and

alleviate in their suffering! How many churches you can build or help to build, where the holy name of God will be honored and adored and prayers continually offered for you, as benefactor! But we need not think it is only the rich that can gain these blessings. The widow's mite will be counted as much as the rich man's gift of gold, if it be given with the proper spirit.

But let us learn an even more comprehensive lesson from this Gospel—namely, the lesson of turning all things toward God either directly, or indirectly through His especially beloved, the poor, the afflicted, the misguided. If we do, it will have a tendency to make us happy also in this world; it also will assure us of that for which our heart ever yearns, a reward for our deeds. How fortunate to have such a means, too, of sweetening the bitterness of life!

GENERAL INTENTION FOR AUGUST

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI.

THE CONVERSION OF AFRICA

Africa is a name that undoubtedly has a far away sound for many of our readers, and maybe its conversion is not a topic that will at first appeal to them; but no land should be considered far away where there are souls to be helped by prayer. Such is the continent of Africa. Salvation is a grace which may be obtained by prayer, and the greater the volume of our prayer and the more fervent its accents, the more abundant the grace that will flow into Africa, a land peopled by countless millions who are still lying under the curse imposed upon the posterity of Cham.

The history of the Dark Continent had a few bright pages to its credit in former centuries. When Catholic writers discuss Christianity in Africa they usually have in mind the northern coast where the Church flourished once upon a time, and gloried in such saints as Augustine, Cyprian, Catherine, Monica, Perpetua, Felicity, and hundreds of others who are still looked upon as stars in the ecclesiastical firmament. But many hundred years have passed away since that wonderful Church, with its eight hundred dioceses, rose and fell. The ruins of Carthage—to give but one example—are still there to show how advanced Christian civilization once was in that quarter of the world.

But the Church and civilization never had a hold on more than a fraction of the vast African continent, nine-tenths of which remained an undiscovered country. Slave dealers, it is true, had skirted along its coasts in recent centuries and touched here and there in order to carry on their infamous traffic, but Africa was still the Dark Continent until comparatively recent times. It was not until fifty or sixty years ago that explorers, seeking gold or ivory, penetrated into the interior, and, as usual, Catholic missionaries, seeking souls, followed in their footsteps. History then began to repeat itself, when dozens of those apostolic men succumbed to the relentless climate, to be succeeded by others who reckoned not the price provided souls were brought to a knowledge of their Redeemer. The sacrifices these men had to undergo and the blood they shed whetted the zeal of apostles in various countries and other missionaries made their way into the heart of Africa. At the present time hundreds of men and women, devoted to the apostolate, are at work in various parts of the interior, trying to stem the tide of Islamism and to win over the Negro races from fetishism and the grossest forms of idolatry. Who has not heard of the White Fathers of Cardinal Lavignerie and their marvellous work in Uganda? Who has not heard of the labors of the Jesuits in Madagascar and along the banks of the Zambezi? Or of the Belgian missionaries in the Congo country? Or of the Fathers of the Holy Ghost in the Equatorial regions? Besides these Orders, there are other groups sharing in the work in Africa and consecrating a tireless energy to the evangelization of the black races on that continent.

Gigantic tasks stretch out before those heroic laborers. A recent writer asserts that a large portion of the African Negro population—fifty millions, perhaps—are followers of Mahomet, and this number is continually increasing. What makes matters worse, the same writer informs us, is that while they yield to the allurements of Islamism, a large Negro element retain the tastes and superstitions that had previously enslaved them in their jungles, where they grovelled in the lowest forms of mental and moral degradation. The Negro followers of the Koran are far removed from all ideas of Christianity, and are therefore harder to convert than out and out pagans. This is the verdict of our missionaries labor in the Sudan and elsewhere, and who will tell you that, in final analysis, in the conversion of Africa is involved not so much the labor of instructing populations steeped in ignorance and corruption as the struggle for supremacy between the abominable tenets of Mahomet and the sublime doctrines of Christ the Redeemer of mankind. Another difficulty which must be counted with is the hostile attitude of the Mohammedans, a danger our mis-

sionaries do not minimize and which makes them all the more insistent in asking for our prayerful help.

Prayer, however, is not the only thing required for the conversion of Africa. Those engaged in the work have a hard task before them, and humbly speaking they are not fully equipped for its accomplishment. Not merely are they poor in the personal poverty which for God's sake they have voluntarily chosen, but their efforts are everywhere impeded through lack of contributions of money from the rest of the world. Not indeed that wealth will convert a pagan nation, for if the missionaries themselves are not apostolic men, if they do not pray and suffer and instruct in season and out of season, what can money do? But the generous donation of gold and silver to our foreign missionaries is a form of cooperation which always pleases God. In Africa especially it is a human agency which has a wide field of usefulness. It helps the seekers after souls to withstand the rigors of the climate, there are churches to be built, travelling expenses to be paid, converts and catechumens to be clothed and fed, the sick and the toil-worn to be looked after. Where are the funds to come from for such purposes if not from the pockets of those who can afford to give? Letters from our missionaries in Africa invariably carry the monotonous refrain, that the faith on that continent would make greater progress if the material resources at their disposal did not so often fail.

And why should we not be as generous in our aid as the missionaries are in theirs? Theirs share in the work is the hard lives they have to lead, their unremitting labors, their loneliness, their tiresome travels, sleepless nights, their application to the study of barbarous tongues. Is it too much to ask the rest of the world to come to their assistance? While giving substantial help to the work of their apostolate, we can, at the same time, make their lives less miserable.

One very good reason why we Catholics should help our missionaries, according to our means, is the generosity of the Protestant sects. Missionary societies in England and the United States are pouring not merely Bibles into Africa but food and clothes and money as well, not to mention the hundred and one trinkets and baubles that appeal to the imagination and cupidty of immature races. Besides, the nations of Africa are shrewd enough to recognize the difference between the well-built churches and schools of the Protestant missions and the poor huts and chapels thatched with leaves, the only kind the Catholics can afford. The Negroes perceive the contrast in those things and are influenced. The allurements of externals easily attract primitive peoples—and only the courage and the strong faith of the dark-skinned Catholics converts keep them from being dazzled by the gifts the sects are able to offer them. Conversion to the true faith is undoubtedly the work of grace, but other elements combine to hasten the work and make it a success, and whenever these are lacking our missionaries are hampered in their efforts. All this demonstrates that gold and silver, although things indifferent in themselves, are sanctified by almsgiving, and money, which is the occasion of so much sin in the world, may, when properly used, contribute to the salvation of innumerable souls. How willing, therefore, those who have the means should be to use their wealth for apostolic purposes, and to let it help in the conversion of a continent of nearly one hundred and sixty millions steeped in paganism!

What have been the results so far? Notwithstanding the trials and difficulties of the apostolate in Africa, there are consolations and hopes. In the hundred and twelve dioceses, vicariates and prefectures apostolic in Catholic Africa, 70 religious Orders and congregations are represented, and their labors have not been fruitless. To cite only a few instances: in Algiers, a colony under French domination, the Church is fully organized, with its parishes and stations. In the Lower Nigeria there are 34,000 converts scattered among a population of 8,000,000 Mussulmans and pagans. Among the Camarooms in 1914 there were 20,000 converts; in 1924 there are 90,000. In Benin, in the last ten years, the number of converts has doubled, it is now 17,000, with 10,000 catechumens under instruction. In Uganda, where so many of our Canadian missionaries are at work, there were ten years ago 118,000 converts; today there are

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200,000 Catholics; and so on. So that, notwithstanding the unpromising soil our missionaries have to their disposal, and the meagre resources at their disposal, their zeal and self-sacrifice are doing marvellous things for the faith.

As members of the true Church, living in a land where our religion is respected and where we have no difficulty in practising it, we should often turn our thoughts to the foreign missions of Africa. The souls of the millions of black men who dwell there are just as dear to the Heart of our Blessed Lord as ours are. Like our own, they were redeemed by His Precious Blood, but those poor natives never had the opportunities we have had of being baptized and instructed in the true faith. What more is required to excite our sympathy? A fervent prayer for the conversion of Africa and a generous offering to help those who are laboring there is the duty of our members during the present month.

E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

Ah, Lord, I find in Thy Heart, which Thou deignest to call my temple, so sweet an abundance of good things that there is nothing left for me to desire or to seek elsewhere.

It is a part of the all-wise plan that runs through and above all our planning, that in matters pertaining to the upbuilding of character, the improving of the talents lent us, each must stand for himself, but none need stand alone; that will be impossible if the will is on the right side—God's side. And with such a Helper, success is sure.

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