

FIVE-MINUTE SERMON.

Second Sunday of Advent.

THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT.

"Jesus, making answer, said to them: Go and tell to John what you have heard and seen." (St. Matt. xi. 4.)

In the Gospel just read, my dear brethren, we are taught a very practical and important lesson. St. John the Baptist had been thrown into prison on account of his bold denunciation of the sins of those who were then in power. His disciples, it would seem, were losing confidence in Him and in what He had taught them. His imprisonment was causing them to waver; and so St. John sends them to our Lord that they may learn from Him whether He was indeed what John had said He was, the promised Messiah. "Art thou He who art to come, or look we for another?"

Now, in what way did our Lord reply to this question? Did He enter into a long and elaborate argument in order to show from Moses and the Prophets that He fulfilled in Himself all that they had foretold? No, it was not by words that our Lord removed their doubts, although never man spake like Him. The way in which He brought the truth home to these men was by deeds. "Go relate to John what you have heard and seen; the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them." It was the works which the Father gave Him to do which gave testimony of Him.

Now, the work of bringing back man to God, which brought our Lord down from heaven and of which He made the beginning, is continued and carried on, since He left this world, by His Church, which He founded for this purpose. By His life, and especially by His death and passion, He purchased for mankind full and complete redemption, inexhaustible grace in this life, and never-ending glory hereafter. To what our Lord did no addition can be made which is not itself due to the merits of our Lord's death and passion. The only thing which remains to be done is to have this grace applied to the souls of men. This application is to be made by the ministrations of the Church; in this way the realization and completion of our Lord's work are entrusted to her; and consequently, since our Lord went to heaven again, the Church is for men in the place of Christ, and has in her hands the ordinary means by which men make their own what our Lord has done for them. It is in the Church that our Lord dwells, it is through the Church He works, it is by her ministrations that men, according to the ordinary course of God's providence, are saved.

If this be so, we must all see how important it is that nothing should be done by Catholics to keep men from the Church, and that everything should be done to bring them within her fold. The Church has a work to do for every man in this vast city of ours. And how is she to perform this work? How is she to bring home to each and all? In early days miracles were the most cogent proof of her supernatural origin. But although miracles are still wrought in the Church, they are not among the ordinary ways by which we can prove to those outside that the Church comes from God. Argument, historical investigation, logic, are good ways of doing this. But men are too busy to study profoundly in our times. There is another way however, and a better one; one more powerful, one which appeals to larger numbers, one without which all the ways are very often unsuccessful, and that is that Catholics should prove themselves to be before the eyes of men what the Church teaches them to be; that by their works, which they are seen to perform, they should make manifest to all that they are in possession of the truth of God.

Can we say, my dear brethren, that this is the case? Let us not be afraid to look at the facts as they really are. Are our lives such as to recommend to those outside that faith in and through which all must be saved? Let each one ask himself this question, and reflect what a terrible thing it will be hereafter if he has so acted as to have shut out from eternal life a single soul which might have been saved had he acted rightly.

NECESSITY OF RELIGION.

By Rev. Edward Flannery in Philadelphia Catholic Standard and Times.

If one stop a moment to think about church, religion, worship it might appear a great mystery of life why men should be religious at all. For what does religion give back in return for all the sacrifices it demands? Of what the world holds precious it offers not even a tiny portion. Riches are avaciously sought by the world, and to sustain his faith a religious man is asked to deprive himself of his belongings. Advancement is greedily craved by the crowd, and the religious man is cautioned to beware of secular honors. Pleasure would lead the earth to dance a merry step in her pursuit, while religion strikes mute the tempting music and fastens still the worshiper's feet. The world and faith meet on irreconcilable ground, the one commanding what the other forbids, the one cherishing what the other scorns, the one offering what the other rejects, and all the while the race of man, cool, calculating mortals, unmoved by sentiment, actuated by selfish principles, grasping present profit wherever it appears, man cannot cling to a good which the world proffers, which seems to be the only reasonable object of desire, because he pauses to hearken to the voice of religion, which to outward appearances can give nothing that the fleshly heart craves.

Nor is this true only of the present. From the moment the warm sun ray first gladdened the frame of man with its cheering heat a mastering instinct forced the new made creature to fly betimes from the pleasing light and seek a shelter in some darkening wood. Whenever history discovers the footprints of the race she traces the path man takes as he winds his way from worldly pleasure to reach some shrine where religion is enthroned. The gods that were oftentimes adored were only the poor creation

chiseled by human touch, but the fact that even idols held a religious dominion bears evidence that our most uncultured ancestors had in common with civilized man the ruling passion for worship and the religious inclination.

Is this religious feeling a disease of our nature, a mania that has crazed the people? Maladies yield to treatment and are destroyed by persistent opposition. We have fought against the religious instinct; collectively and individually we have struggled to tear the feeling from our being that, forgetful of its demands, we might throw ourselves into the mad rush of pleasure and grip with ardent embrace the beckoning joys as they fled along. Brainy men have weighed the question, declaring it a wild fantasy that we should be religious. Prudent men have given it thought, saying the future would be brighter could men awake from the foolish dream. Dis-solute men have brushed the whole matter aside with a thoughtless sweep, protesting that no consideration of what religion claims must bar their road to enjoyment. You have struggled with the question; so has your neighbor. You remember well and can now recall the stages in his combat. He was a Catholic, by the grace of God, though after his falling off he protested with sacrilegious jest that he had been a Catholic for the same reason he was a Democrat or Republican in politics, following the lead of his father. How he first came to drop away concerns us little. Perhaps the pastor neglected to trade at his store, or he may have taken umbrage at something said in the pulpit. At all events he ceased attending to his religious duties, and as the plant which is unwatered dries, withers and dies, faith in that man's soul was drooping. With the lessening of faith he began to value his reason. He sought to lead others away. The church was all very well for women and nervous men, but for real men like himself there was no need of such nonsense; indeed it was an obligation of manhood to denounce priest, service and all such mummery, and thus root out the impostures. He has gotten rid of his religion; aye, but he falls sick, the despised minister of God is at his side answering his pitiful cries and seeking to comfort him by the helps with which he had vainly sought to dispense. He had only given ether, when he thought he had killed his faith, for the religious instinct of the soul is undying. It is so imbedded in the spirit of man as to be a very part of his nature.

Since it is not a disease, but an essential quality of our nature, we should be contented differently would we escape the necessity of practicing religion. As food is required for the body that it may live and thrive, so is religion of some kind indispensable to the soul. We have not as yet discovered the secret of doing without faith, as we have not arrived at the possibility of living without bodily nourishment.

We must accept this condition, agreeable or distasteful as it may be, or might visit our lot with misery. But just as one who may regret that the body must be fed, thus forcing him to toilsome labor, withal works on, so must we, though railing at the dire necessity, be religious, since without religion our nature is maimed and weakened. When we understand aright we shall know how intimately religion is interwoven with our well being. But understand not, we cannot escape the yoke. We may carry it willingly, and it couples us with happiness. We may rebel against the weight which we call religious duty, and, as with a burden, we are crushed into woe by the very absence of what our nature seeks.

HEAVEN OUR HOME.

Where God is, there must man be if he would know the happiness which his heart craves, for nothing here satisfies him, nor could he ever feel satisfied till he is in possession of God forever. And so we look up to the heavens and feel we see our home and long to be with the God that made us. Earthly glory fades into nothingness when we think of the eternal and infinite glory of heaven. We realize that all terrestrial things are passing away and that we are passing with them, and so good men put forth their best efforts to make their end secure and, like the apostle, they declare, "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come." "Where," to continue St. Paul's words, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath in store for them who love Him."

How differently men look upon the future. Some say there is no future life; others acknowledge it and strive to prepare themselves for it, while a vast number fail to give God the slightest recognition, while counting presumptuously on His goodness that He will one day bring them to Himself and to happiness eternal.

How many, alas, are without any thought or hope of heaven; and for that reason satiate themselves with the things of earth! Their appetites are glutted, their passions are indulged as far as they dare, they live selfishly for self and do nothing but what will bring them gain or gratification of some kind or other, for they feel that what they are to get must be got here, and as they realize life is fast running away, they run recklessly headlong to get all they can from it before death brings it to a long, last close.

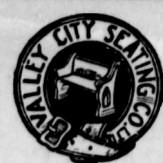
Alas, how foolishly they act! If such men would but look around them, view all the beautiful things of nature; the earth with its bounteous products for their sustenance; the heavens above them with the glorious sun shining by day and the moon and the stars giving light by night, should they not rise from

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these great blessings of creation and find the glorious and gracious and good Creator of all these things in an infinite and kind and loving God. Who has bestowed on man these things for his mortal existence in preparation for an immortality of everlasting peace and happiness, and to cause him to love and serve Him and keep His law, which He hath written in every human heart.

How very fortunate is the Christian who has the light of revelation to illumine his mind and feels the power of grace to influence his heart and strengthen in his will! For him God is near and he sees Him with the eyes of faith. He has the divine word instructing him in the way he should go, and he has the holy sacraments to strengthen him on the road to eternal life. Such a one realizes that he is not made for this world, but for a life to come, and he strives to live up to a standard of morality that will one day entitle him to be admitted to God, never to be separated from Him.

But do not the enlightened owe a duty to the less favored, namely, by their lives of perfection to be an example for their instruction? And this is what our Lord meant when He said to His followers, "so let your light shine that others, seeing, they too, may glorify their Father Who is in heaven."

In this regard should not we Catholics perfect ourselves by the frequent worthy reception of the sacraments, and thus give example to all of the highest perfection and virtue, making God known and loved, because of our own constant acknowledgement of Him and our own perfect love?

Is it not with us often as it is with most others always, that we are taken up so much with the things of this world, its wealth, its honor, its pleasures, that we lose sight, at least for the time, of heaven? Do we not sometimes let the spirit of this world and its principles take hold of us, which causes us to lose the spirit and relish for the things of God and eternity? And so, like the mere worldlying, we will run after the things of every-day life which evade our grasp, or if we get them, find that they prove vain and unsatisfactory and endanger our soul's salvation.

Our Lord warns us against this folly and tells us we can not serve two masters — God and Mammon. We must choose one or the other. He tells us what would it profit if we gained the whole world and lost our soul, and He bids us not to lay after the riches of this world which prove eternal ruin to so many, but that we should do good with the means He gives us by helping our less favored brethren; in a word, that we should lay up our treasures in heaven by living well and doing good, where the moth doth not enter nor the rust consume.

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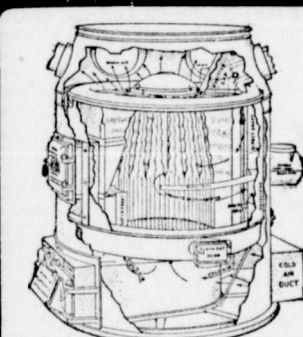
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