

**FIVE MINUTE SERMON**

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**THE VALUE OF OUR SOUL**

"What exchange shall a man give for his soul?" (Matt. xvi. 26.)

Advent, my dear brethren, teaches us how Almighty God values the souls of men, for the burden of the message of Advent is—the coming of the Saviour. It was for the souls of men—their rescue, their sanctification, their salvation—that the Saviour came.

Behold, then, the value that God set on our souls, for it was for their sake the Son of God came down from heaven and became man. For their sake the infant was born at Bethlehem, and the stable was His first church, where He was worshipped by Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. For their sake the Saviour sanctified poverty, daily toil, and a humble home at Nazareth. Thirty years, for their sake, were spent to teach us how to live; and, then for three years, He taught and preached that our souls might know Him and believe in Him. And His public life was made wondrous by His kindly words and deeds and miracles, each one a lesson to us, revealing what the good God does for our souls by His graces and His Sacraments. Then, to crown it all, to impress the stamp of Divine love upon His life, of His own will He offered Himself for us in His Passion, and was scourged and crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, and on it He died to purchase our souls from sin and hell. This is the value the Saviour set upon our souls.

How proud and grateful we should be that God has so loved us as to give His only Son the price and redemption of the souls of men. And do we reverence, treasure, value our souls as we should? My dear brethren, in reply to this we must distinguish. We all know what faith teaches us about the value of our souls, but we must own that our lives frequently, in practice, belie the profession that we make.

For we know and profess that our soul is a spirit, created to the image of God; that it is immortal, destined for heaven, redeemed, enriched with graces; that all the world and all that it can offer of pleasure, happiness, glory, can never satisfy its yearnings, for our soul is meant for God. He is its first beginning, and its last end. The possession of God and the blessed vision of His majesty can alone be its eternal happiness.

But alas! in act, in practice, how sadly different are we! How our lives contradict our profession! Our voice proclaims, repeating our Lord's blessed words, "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" And our daily actions, with a meanness and a pettiness inconceivable, defile these souls with the selfishness and negligence of venial sins. And, alas! deluded by the tempter, we have bartered away our souls for some mortal sin—a shameful, short-lived pleasure or profit. Like Judas, we have sold to the devil the world, or the flesh, when we have consented to sin.

"What will you give me and I will deliver it to you?" Look back, and deplore for what you have betrayed your own soul! Have all our past sins together any equivalent to offer us in exchange for our soul? To that for which a man sins he has made his soul a slave. Let envy, hatred, impure love, the joys of avarice, ambition, point to anyone who has made a good bargain with anything they can offer in exchange for his soul. Look through history, and you will find not one. Ask amongst the lost from the successful in this world, who won fame and money and glory and everything they thought that they could desire, and their answer would be the same sad lament, "Alas! what can a man give in exchange for his soul!"

But the Saviour has had faithful ones, who have understood and valued their souls at their proper worth—those who, like blessed Peter, have said, "Behold, we have left all things and have followed Thee" (Matt. xix. 27); those who, like Mary, have chosen the better part, and consecrated their love to Him Who lived and died for love of them; those, the blessed martyrs, who endured dungeons, fire, and sword, rather than lose their soul by denying their faith or being ashamed of the Cross of Christ. All the Saints, all those who have persevered unto death, have practically and heroically despised the world and all that it can offer in exchange for their souls. All that the world could offer would pass away, and their souls were made for eternity. All that the world could offer was a lie and a delusion; there was no guarantee of truth; and were their souls to be satisfied with that? Satisfied? No; they despised all that this world could boast of, for the God of heaven had purchased their souls for the kingdom of heaven.

Helped by their example and their prayers, let us wisely treasure and value our immortal souls. Let us bring them to Him Who purchased them with His precious Blood—purchased as well as created them. The Saviour came for our souls' sake. So the very offering He would love that each should make Him at Christmas-time is the soul that He created, the soul that He redeemed, the soul that He has loved so much. Let us prepare it for a home for Him. Repentance can cleanse it, devotion can warm it, humility sweeten it. All else can be driven out, and the door kept open for His coming. And

with the help of the Angels, who sang at His birth, and of the Saints, whose souls give Him homage in heaven, we may hope to give Him a welcome when He comes. Holy Communion is the welcome of a soul which dedicates itself to His love and service.

**THE SERVICE OF MAMMON**

It is still clutching at the hearts of men, relentless in its grasp, death-dealing to the soul, this passionate greed for gain. War may rage, brave-souled men may give their lives in holy sacrifice for a wondrous cause, pestilence may gather in a blighted harvest, yet they care not, those gold-ridden worshippers of Mammon. Their cult goes on apace. They stand with open maw like beasts with appetite whetted at the sight of new prey. "Gold and more gold," is their shrill cry. Gold, yes, if it cost even the life-blood of the starving, shivering poor.

Strange, indeed, it seems and well nigh beyond belief, that men living in a day such as the world has never seen before, when death seems hovering in our very midst, should have none the less go about seeking by what manner, old or new, they may swell the board in their coffers. And yet, it is but too true, why those glaring headlines in our papers, to tell of another profiteering scandal? Why must our legislators turn aside from the business of war to the business of investigating some new swindle? Why, worst of all, must our cities hold families almost without number, to whom the very necessities of life, could they be secured, would come as a luxury?

That the cost of living should increase during a crisis such as the present is to be expected, because our endeavor now is to supply not only the needs of our people here in this country, but also to give the best we have for the support of the millions we have already sent overseas, to say nothing of our valiant Allies who, for the present, must center their effort upon destruction rather than upon production. Under such conditions we should naturally look for unusual increase in the price of the necessities of life. The demand is extraordinarily increased, while the source of supply, although decidedly extended beyond normal, is not by any means adequate. It is not to excess along these lines that we refer, but rather to the deliberate endeavor on the part of certain men to take advantage of any turn of events, in order that they may make the need of the people an occasion for swelling an already excessive income. An example or two will illustrate my meaning.

During the recent influenza epidemic, the price of camphor was more than trebled. This change, while rather unimportant, seemed peculiar and so, as a matter of curiosity, I made a little investigation. As a result, I found that people were buying the camphor under the old-fashioned impression that by keeping it above their persons they would be protected against the disease. To such an extent was this true that druggists who might not sell an ounce of camphor in weeks were disposing of a pound and even more each day. Upon further inquiry at a large wholesale house, I learned that there was an abundant supply of camphor, that there was really no need for the exorbitant price, save that some money leech, with the malvolent foresight of Judas, had cornered the market and was using the near superstition of the people to increase his miserable hoard.

Another instance occurred in one of our large cities. The physicians were advising that their patients be given orange juice. Straightway the price of oranges began to soar until it was four times as great as it had been at the beginning of the epidemic. Meanwhile it was proved that four carloads of oranges billed for that city had been diverted elsewhere and allowed to rot in the yards because no market was found.

These examples, chosen because of their simplicity, are only instances of what is occurring daily on a larger and more vital scale. Men have gone money-mad. Their one idea is the acquisition of wealth. With this as their intent upon reaching this goal, there is no place for higher and purer thoughts. The shortest distance between self and wealth is a straight line and the money-snatcher will not deviate from this path even by a hair's breadth, come what may. If it cost a human life, yes, even thousands of them, the human lives must go. If it spreads desolation and misery on every hand, this matter is not. If it ruins reputations and shatters hopes, this is accepted as a matter of course. The goal must be reached although only self and wealth may survive the ruin.

We shudder when we hear and read what our heartless antagonist has done in this terrible War. Our hearts burn within us and are eased of their pain only by the stern determination of our honored President and his counselors who voice the sentiment of the nation when they inform the authors of these grave misdeeds that they must cease; that the nation's lifeblood, to the very last drop, if necessary, will flow until these wrongs be redressed.

But is it less an atrocity because refined, when men, either singly or banded together, make it well nigh impossible for God's poor to live, while even those possessed of moderate means feel the pressure of poverty? We bewail the starving poor in the countries where the relentless

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German has left the stamp of his iron heel. But what of the hundreds of thousands at home, who wonder, from day to day, how long their scanty supply of resources will suffice to keep life within them? The Germans did not do this.

We capture, and rightly so, the unrestricted and cruel methods of submarine warfare. The heart turns sick at the thought of the thousands and thousands thus sent to a sudden and cheerless grave. We can hardly bear the thought of the millions of tons of foodstuffs wantonly sent into the depths of the sea. But what of the hundreds of thousands of tons of bananas and other fruit and vegetable products flung into the West Indian waters or the waters outside our greater sea ports, or, if brought ashore, left to decay on the wharves or in the storehouses lest, perchance, the market price should be lowered by too abundant a supply? Destruction and waste, view them as we may, are still destruction and waste. Criminals are none the less criminals because, forsooth, they sit in richly appointed offices dictating the wireless message that bids such un pitying destruction go on.

We rejoice that the Allied armies have entered the nests of the submarine sea-scavengers and put them to flight. But when will the power arise that will crush these human vultures, birds of an unclean variety, preying upon our poor? Vast sums of money are being disbursed in the endeavor to search out those who give aid to the enemy, traitors we call them and traitors they are, who would not set any bounds to efforts to accomplish our country's ruin. But are they less traitors who produce an inferior quality of ammunition, who enrich themselves by furnishing poorer qualities of food, clothing and other supplies to those brave boys of ours who are toiling for us overseas, even to the death? Surely it would be productive of much good, an insurance for the future welfare of our country, if only the devious paths of these wrong doers were traced out by the Secret Service; then there would be frequent and profitable employment for many a firing squad.

But, sad to say, there is little in law and order that appeals to such men. Law, to them, is the law of wealth. Their only concept of order is such an adjustment of affairs as will give them an increase of gain. They are quite as skillful in bringing about such an adjustment as they are in evading the payment of their full income tax.

How to reach these men is a problem of difficult solution. Appeal to the feelings is vain. Their sensibility to sympathy for their fellow-men has been stunted in its growth and dulled by the pressure of greed. They do not or cannot perceive that they are kindling in the masses the fires of Socialism and anarchy.

For the present generation there seems little hope. For the future, there is one bright prospect, provided only the education of the youth now in our schools be directed along its proper path. Educate them to be citizens of the City of God and they will be true and loyal citizens of the cities of men. Teach them to appreciate supernatural values and they will measure rightly the goods of time. Show them that their highest and last end is God, that the longing in their hearts is to find rest in Him, and the glitter of earthly things will have little power to draw them away from their one purpose in life thus clearly perceived.—Edward Tivnan, S. J., in America.

**THE FIRST CHRISTMAS DAY**

Winter had thrown its robe of spotless white over the fair face of Nature the stripes of contending hosts and the din of arms had for the first time in centuries died away. The victorious Eagles of the Imperial Caesars had taken their loftiest flight and spread their wings over a conquered world.

When, on a cold, bleak December night, the stars drifting unconsciously across the sky and shining serenely through their azure homes, out upon the midnight air and silence enveloping a slumbering world, behold. He was born whose Word pierced the realms of ancient night. He whom myriads of angels adore, born in a poor stable, holding court with the shepherds, He who could form creation from naught, He who hurls the thunderbolt, was wrapped in swaddling clothes. He whom the heavens cannot contain was peacefully slumbering in the arms of the Virgin of Nazareth. How feeble the effort when man attempts to describe this solemn yet lovingly tender Mystery!

The angels, appearing in the solemn stillness of midnight, chanted their heaven-born canticles, which were heard by the ravished ears of the listening shepherds. Suddenly the vision disappears! The mystic symphony is hushed into stillness. The midnight watchers hear naught but the sighing of the wind or the bark of the watch-dog—which ever and anon disturbed the solitude of slumbering Bethlehem. Wrapped in wonder and amazement, the shepherds go over to Bethlehem to adore the "Pastor Pastorum."

Looking into the cave in order to assure themselves that they had reached the end of their nightly pilgrimage, these "Men of Good Will" discovered Him who came to preach the Gospel to the poor and to abolish the curse of slavery, there reposing under the form of a little babe peacefully resting in His humble crib.

The Infant God was next visited by the Magi, who followed the guiding star from the far Orient to the "hallowed hamlet of Bethlehem." They found Him wrapped in soft garments, nor reposing in the cradle of luxury surrounded by numberless worldly attendants, but they found Him occupying His throne of perpetual poverty, protected from the chilling cold blast by the breathings of the humblest of beasts. What a sight must have met the gaze of the Magi skilled in ancient lore! The feeble light of the lovely luminary enabled them to perceive an aged patriarch, a tender Virgin and a helpless Infant—whom they recognized as God!

What a spectacle! The King of Eternal Ages born in time, adored by the Wise of earth. The oracle of Him who came to abolish sacrifice was not to be covered with blood. Hence, the Magi did not offer Him either spotted lambs or white heifers. They offered Him gold as an earthly price, myrrh and incense as God.

"Oh!" exclaims Chateaubriand, "how antiquity would have expatiated in praise of this wonder! What a picture a Homer or a Virgil would have left us of the Son of God in a manger, of the songs of the shepherds, of the Magi conducted by a star, of the angels descending to the desert, of a Virgin Mother adoring her new born Babe, and of this scene of innocence, enchantment and grandeur!"

What pleasing recollections the time of Christmas brings with it. Again the family gathers round the domestic hearth and recalls the memory of bygone days. The absent dear ones are present in spirit. The old relate the many soul-stirring events that time, in his hurried march, has wrought upon their checkered career. The aged sire and venerable matron whose looks have been whitened by the winters long ago, are as young again, and their countenances are lit up with the joy of youth. The weather-beaten sailor, far away on the seething sea, whose frame has become inured to the blasts of perpetual winter, has joyful visions of his far-off happy home on Christmas Day. Even the poor excited soldier, who wears the badge of his adopted country, thinks tenderly of the violet vales and sparkling streams of his native land; and his heart warms, his pulse beats quicker, as he hears the booms of musketry and the chimes of a thousand bells—proclaiming that it is Christmas Day. Joy seems to permeate all classes; the young are doubly cheerful, and their joy seeks expression in the effluent beams that light their innocent faces. What does all this joy, this universal gladness show but that God Man by His coming brought "peace and joy to men of good will."

It does but echo the strain heard centuries ago on the plains of Palestine when the angelic hosts sang in clear, liquid resonance to the astonished shepherds: "Glory be to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will." O Christians! from the depths of your ransomed souls, pour forth your sincerest hymns of love and praise, and with gratitude offer your new-born King the gold of charity and the incense of prayer.

Ye heavenly powers, chant your gladsome, harmonious hymns before the throne of the Omnipotent—for this is Christmas Day.—My Message.

Our life in this world is like the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream in order to reach heaven, it must be planted in a humbled heart; we can only mount it by distinct steps of humility and discipline.—Saint Benedict.

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