

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

REASON AND FAITH
"Thy faith hath made thee whole." (Luke xviii, 42.)

If there is one thing more than another characteristic of the present time, it is lack of faith. A spirit of incredulity pervades everywhere. We are too apt to deny the existence of all that cannot be seen by our own eyes, heard by our own ears, or touched by ourselves. And yet, we must believe some things on the testimony of others. We believe that Rome, Paris and London exist, though we never saw them. We believe on the testimony of others that such historical characters existed as Washington, Napoleon and Julius Caesar.

We accept some things, then, on the authority of others. We do not doubt that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo; that Columbus discovered America; or that Caesar conquered Gaul; although these events happened years before we were born.

But, in religious matters, many doubt everything. They resemble Thomas, to whom our Lord said: "Because thou hast seen, Thomas, thou hast believed. Blessed are they who have not seen but have believed."

Many suppose that reason is capable of solving all questions. Rejecting revelation, they tell us that reason unaided is sufficient to guide us through all the trials of this life and prepare us for the next. A little study and a moment's reflection would teach them the absurdity and falsity of such a position.

Before the coming of our Saviour, reason held sway. The result was, that the most abominable vices existed, were considered right and reasonable; that vices, and crimes were honored as gods; and that the most serious errors existed concerning the most important questions. Nothing could be more important and interesting to man than a proper knowledge of the nature and providence of God, of the origin of the world, of man's duty to God, of man's origin, of his destiny and of the causes of the evils surrounding him. The best pagan philosophers of antiquity knew little of these questions. They worshipped everything except God. Who alone is to be worshipped and adored. They paid divine honors to the sun, moon and stars. They worshipped the sea, the river and the forest. They even worshipped vices and crimes and had idols built to their honor.

Every pagan city was filled with temples which were adorned with idols erected to their false gods. Such was the case everywhere, except in Palestine. Instead of praying to the one true and only God and placing confidence in divine Providence, the Pagans, relying upon unaided reason, had recourse to lying oracles, fortune tellers and the interpretation of dreams in order to ascertain their destiny.

Some of these philosophers it is true, believed in one God, but were confused in their teachings concerning Him. They had no definite knowledge to impart.

Similar was the case regarding the origin of the world. Aristotle taught that it was eternal. Others were of the opinion that it was formed by accident, while some said that it was an emanation from or a portion of the divinity.

Reason met with no better success in teaching man's duty, origin and destiny. Since it knew nothing definite of God, it could have no certain knowledge of man's duty to God. Nor could it tell whence man came or whether he was going. All these important questions were enveloped in impenetrable darkness. It is no wonder they took gloomy view of life. Without a true knowledge of God here, they had no hope in a hereafter. Doubt and despair existed everywhere. Few, if any, had a belief in the future state. Many of the greatest philosophers not only taught but put into practice self-destruction as an act of virtue.

Since the greatest of ancient or modern philosophers, relying on unaided reason could at most point out a probability of a future state; since they had but a vague idea of God and man's duties towards Him; since they could tell nothing of the origin of this world or of man, there exists a necessity of a divine revelation to teach us of God, of the origin of the world, and of that invisible country which is destined to receive the souls of men after their separation from the body.

For reason could not guide us safely through the wilderness of this life. It could not lead us to the promised land that lies beyond. Reason can find out some truths, as, for example, the existence of God. But there are certain truths that the deepest intellect of man could never fathom. Hence the necessity of revelation.

Revelation has been given. God's teaching, the cross of Christ, was a stumbling-block to the Jew, but to the educated, the rationalistic Greek, it was folly, as it still is to those who make a god of reason.

Reason, then, as now, wished to subject everything to its measure; and when its measure could reach no farther, it was sure it had measured infinity, God Himself. It is the finite measuring the infinite; poor, weak, helpless human reason declaring itself the judge of eternal reason.

The proper office of reason is to examine whether God has spoken to man; when it finds that God has spoken then its duty is to believe the word of God, even if it is incomprehensible. God can do many things man cannot understand. Hence when we know on good authority that God has taught or done certain things, we

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MAGLOIRE PAQUIN
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must believe them although we do not understand them.

St. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Words could not be clearer. No matter what you do, pray night and day; keep holy the Lord's day with precision; commit the Scriptures to memory; be kind to your parents; love your neighbor; be just—honorable and honest; be charitable to the poor; be pure in thought, word and deed; perform various acts of piety; still, you are not pleasing to almighty God unless you have faith.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith is the foundation of all virtues. We must have it first, else the building will fall. Faith is a divine virtue by which we believe all that God teaches because He can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Faith differs from human credence which we give to the word of man. Christian faith is based on the infallible word of God. It enkindles in the soul perfect certitude. It is infused into the soul in baptism and is a supernatural light added to the natural light of reason.

We believe because Christ Who taught is God. He proved His divinity and established His mission by means of prophecies and miracles. These prophecies and miracles are historical facts. They rest on at least as solid authority as does any well-founded historical fact and cannot be denied without overturning all history. No one but God can perform a miracle. Jesus Christ proved His divinity and the divinity of His teaching by the performance of many miracles, as, for example, the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead and His own resurrection.

Reason, then, teaches us that Jesus Christ was God. Genuine reason also teaches that when God teaches anything we must believe because He cannot deceive us.

We believe that Christ is God, because He fulfilled the prophecies and performed many miracles. We believe all He taught because He is God. He cannot mislead us. He gave us His revelation, not to extinguish reason, but to assist it. Reason leads us to the door of the true Church of God. Is the Catholic Church the Church Christ established upon earth?

This is a fact that reason can find out. There is no reason why Caesar should have conquered Gaul nearly two thousand years ago, nor is there any reason why Napoleon should have died in exile on St. Helena during the century just passed. Still, to doubt these things would be most unreasonable, because they are based on such authority that to deny it would be to overturn all historical certitude.

If we have such certainty with regard to these human events, how much greater is our certainty regarding the superhuman events related of Christ, His Apostles and their successors.

These are within the domain of reason. The testimony to the fact is what examines.

That Christ lived upon earth, that He performed many wonderful works, that His miracles proved Him to be God, that He chose twelve Apostles, that after His death He sent them into the world to teach His Gospel to every creature, that some of His Apostles and disciples, years after His death, embodied part of His teachings in the Gospels, epistles and other writings which we call the New Testament, that the Church which He founded to lead men to heaven was to continue till the end of time according to His promise that the Holy Ghost would teach her all truth and that He Himself would abide with her forever, and that this Church has never ceased for the past eighteen hundred years to lead souls to heaven by teaching Christ's doctrines pure and undefiled—these are well known, well founded historical facts, which the reason of any man, whose mind is not darkened by the thick clouds of passion and prejudice, can find out without the shadow of a doubt.

Thus we see that reason will lead us to the door of the true Church. It will teach us that Jesus Christ is God, that He founded a Church to

last forever and that there is only one Church which comes down to us through the lapse of ages from the time of Christ.

Although reason will lead one to the door of the true Church, it requires a special grace of God to lead one to enter its sacred portals. This grace is sometimes rejected.

Thus we see that we can do nothing without God. Faith in God and His teachings is a necessity. Jesus Christ is the light that came into the world to enlighten its darkness. Instead of rejecting that light as many do, all should turn toward it with joy and gladness. The truth He preached came from heaven; hence all should cheerfully accept it. How different was the fact. Even in the time of Christ, the Jews loved darkness better than light. The Jews and heathens did everything to oppose His teachings. When He spoke of His divinity, they said He was a blasphemer. When He said He was of the same nature as the Father and that He was older than Abraham, they sought to stone Him. When He spoke to them of the Bread of Eternal Life, and announced that He was about to institute the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, they said it was impossible, and many even of His disciples withdrew from Him.

They denied many of His miracles. Those that it was impossible for them to deny (as they were well authenticated facts), they tried to explain or attribute to some evil power. If, then, Our Divine Lord was despised when He was on earth and His teachings denied, is it any wonder that His Church, the teacher of nations, should be despised and her teachings denied at the present day?

Irreligion is fashionable, incredulity tempting. Many are governed by fashion. Without examining for themselves, they imitate in their words and actions those with whom they associate. They want to be popular. And they foolishly think that the road to popularity is the denial of the religion of Christ, and the doubting of everything in religious matters.

Some hopefully look forward to a better day when all will be united in the bonds of a common Christian brotherhood. They think that the spirit of doubt and denial has about run its course; that men are beginning to see the fallacy of the principle or private interpretation from which this universal doubt and denial springs; and that the idolatry of man's individual reason must at last give place to the divine authority of faith.

We have seen the proper office of reason. We have seen that when it is abused, it leads to the most abominable doctrines and practices, as in the case of the pagan of antiquity and the infidel of to-day; but that when properly used, when used as the handmaid of faith, it leads to God.

There are some truths that man by his reason alone can find out, as, for example, the existence of God and the spirituality of the soul. But there are other truths that the deepest intellect of man could never fathom, as the truth that God, the Creator and Lord of all things is one in essence and three in person and that the soul being immortal is destined to live forever happy or miserable according to his works.

These and other truths required a special revelation of God and an act of faith on our part. God has revealed them. Reason teaches that we must believe them.

They are of the utmost importance, not only for our future, but also for our present life. For, if God created us, we are creatures of God and owe Him love, veneration and adoration.

Hence, the great commandment "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart and with thy

whole soul and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," which is the source of so much good and so many blessings among Christians, was never thought of by the Pagans or the philosophers of antiquity.

He was likewise ignorant of the second great command, which is like unto the first. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Hence, we witness their cruel barbarity, their indifference to human suffering, their terrible treatment of prisoners, women, children and slaves. These were the results of the abuse of reason in matters relating to religion. It was not until the time of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, that they and many other cruel, heartless, horrible, heathenish practices were declared illegal and contrary to Christian principles.

Regarding the soul's immortality, reason is equally uncertain. Philo sophy and reason of antiquity affirmed that the soul was spiritual or immaterial, i. e., not composed of matter, and hence, unlike the body, not subject to decay or dissolution. Still, it was but an opinion, weak and wavering. It was unlike the faith, the confidence firm and immovable which revelation gives.

It was far different from the Christian's Creed. "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting."

Reason, then, is not that light which is to guide us through darkness of the valley of life to the promised land that lies beyond. It was uncertain, weak and wavering. We needed a guide that was certain, strong and unwavering. We needed revelation. That has been given. Reason teaches us that God has spoken to man. And when man knows that God speaks, genuine reason dictates that man humbly bow his head and believe the Word of God.

Reason is to seek the light of revelation and follow its guidance when found. Reason can perfectly weigh the evidences of revelation, and that God who said "Ask and you shall receive" will grant the gift of faith. Anything that is not revealed, true reason can deal with as she pleases. She can question or reject it. But when reason once knows a truth is revealed, when she once sees a teaching is unchangeable, infallible and divine; then that teaching claims her assent and submission. Then it becomes an object of faith.

Let us, my dear friends, use our reason properly. Let us endeavor, at all times, to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in us. And let us firmly believe all the truths that God has revealed, for though they may be above reason, they are not contrary to it, and that God Who has revealed them can not deceive us.

BENSON AND HIS FATHER

Ceaseless industry was one of the striking features of the late Monsignor Benson's character, says The Sacred Heart Review. He vowed never to be a moment idle. A writer in an English paper, who considers that this habit of industry was the result of self-discipline. As a boy Robert Hugh Benson was not so given to work. His father writing in a diary of his own dislike for "galling over-work" goes on to say that his own failure in patience may be "the real secret why my Hugh dislikes and shrinks from work and seems absolutely set on life's yielding him as much innocent (thank God!) fun as can be extracted from his hours. Again he referred to this fun-loving tendency in noting a scribble to consult with 'Arthur, Lytton (the head master) and Hughie himself.'"

"With his dear mother, we are all against it (the boy's wish to leave India) and prepare for civil service in India. We all feel that being against it will throw him off from the only intellectual and earnest purpose as to his future life which he has as yet shown. 'Our little sheltered boy' as his mother says, and breaks my heart. I always reckoned on this to be my great friend as I grew old."

Monsignor Benson in his "Confessions of a Convert" relates the closing scene in his father's life:

"In October, 1896, my father suddenly died on his knees in church during a visit to Mr. Gladstone, at Hawarden. I was superintending the Sunday school at the Eton mission when a telegram was put into my hands announcing the fact. On my way up to Hawarden that night I recited as usual the Evening Prayer appointed for the day, and in the second lesson read the words: 'Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father, and then I will follow Thee.'"

Within six weeks of his father's death the claims of the Catholic Church came before Robert Hugh Benson for the first time, and his reception into the Church followed as a natural consequence of his earnest seeking for the truth. "Remember he has followed his conscience after all," said an Anglican bishop to Mrs. Benson, "and what else could his father wish for him than that?"

THE ANGELUS BELL IN SOUTH AFRICA

"A beautiful sight, indeed, is the Trappist Settlement in the Wild Lands of South Africa," writes Father Howlett, O.M.I. "Everything speaks to you of peace and of work, for the monk never ceases to impress upon the mind of the black man the

dignity of labor. The river, idle for centuries past, now works the busy mill, grinds the wheat, and cuts the great forest trees into planks of every size and shape. Here are native boys preparing the African mahogany, others are hewing stones, while still others are busy at the wine vats, getting them ready for the vintage that will soon be gathered. In the orchard, filled with trees from every country, birds of gay plumage flit to and fro, while over the fields of snow-white lilies swarm the honey suckers, robbing the plants of the sweetness

which the monks had hoped to save for their bees. And as you stand admiring this beautiful picture, a sound comes to your ear which carries you back to the old world, back to the Homeland. It brings before your mind the days of your youth, the friends of yore, the old parish church, and the gray-haired priest. It echoes o'er valley and hill; the native rests from his work, and with the monk and nun bends in prayer—for it is the Angelus bell, ringing out the Angels greeting, the Sweet Ave Maria!"—Sacred Heart Review.

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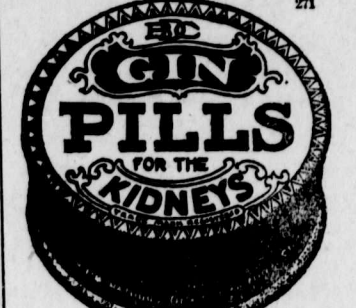
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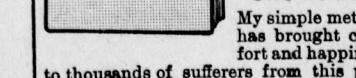
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