

PASTORAL SECTION

HOMILETICS

QUINQUAGESIMA (February 5)

OUR LENTEN RESOLUTION

(I Cor. 13 1-13) We are about to enter the holy season of Lent. The Epistle this morning, undoubtedly Paul's most magnificent passage, is a fitting introduction to this season. The charity of which Paul speaks is love of neighbor issuing from the love which God has shown for us and the love we return to Him.

Resolution and growth

To many of us Lent is a time for asking ourselves: "What extra penance will I perform?" "How many candies will I give up?" "Which will I give up: my smoking or my drinking?" "Do I really need a new dress for Easter?"

Penance is good. Mortification is good, But does it ever occur to us that they will profit us nothing without real charity? "If I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing." St. Paul here is not throwing penances and mortifications overboard. But for him the resolution must be something very positive, something that has effect not only on our waistlines but also on our neighbor.

Our Lenten resolution must be "outgoing". For example: "I will not miss a chance to help another." It seems ridiculous to feel so virtuous

about our acts of mortification and be at the same time as selfish, impatient, irritable and critical as ever.

If there is anything the Church wants of us during this season, it is progressive growth in charity, a growth that does not stop with Easter Sunday. Ideally, all of us should have grown in charity as we grew in age. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child. . . . Now that I have become a man, I have put away the things of a child." Every growth in age must be accompanied by arrival at a new level of loving. Every step forward must be a growth in charity. This is what we must pray for during this holy season.

Application to our discussions

The resolution then is "I will not miss a chance to help another." The list of opportunities to help our neighbor is inexhaustible. But let us mention only one. It is by no means the first or the most important in the list. But in it we could experience a real growth in charity. I am referring to politeness, politeness in our discussions as well as in our conversations. "Charity is patient, is kind, . . . does not envy, is not pretentious, is not puffed up, is not provoked, is not self-seeking, thinks no evil." Let us apply this even to our discussions.

Discussion is a way of helping another find the truth. You may be right, your arguments may be impregnable, but you must present your arguments or opinions with politeness, with charity. Be open-minded; try to understand the other person's position; make every attempt at reconciliation; win his sympathy by seeing him as a friend, as a brother, as Christ Himself; do not make it difficult for him to accept the truth by ridiculing his person; finally, be humble, pride throws everything into confusion.

A psychologist summed up his principles of discussion this way: "In any discussion, the first rule is: thou shalt *talk* with your whole heart, with your whole mind and with your whole soul. The second is: thou shalt *listen* with your whole heart, with your whole mind and with your whole soul" (Fr. J. Bulatao, S.J.). That is charity.

This Lent let us grow in charity, never miss a chance to help another and become more Christlike in our discussions and conversations.

OBSTACLES TO THE APOSTOLATE

Christ was like to us in all things save sin. He shared in our infirmities, weakness . . . and temptations. He could truly say to us: "I know exactly how you feel. I was also tempted. The servant is not above his master." Christ submitted to the three temptations that all of us go through, namely, the temptation to be sensational and the temptation to amass power and wealth.

The temptation to seek the easy way

Christ was very hungry. Changing the stones into bread seemed to be a practical and easy way out of it. But, no. "Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." When one of His Apostles brought Him food, saying: "Master, eat," He replied: "I have meat to eat, which you know not. . . . My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me" (Jo. 4/34).

The will of God is not always easy to do. To seek the easy way of security is to seek one's own interest. But Christ has raised up His standard which demands total disinterested in His service. For it is no longer our lives that we are living but Christ's.

Too often the easy way proves to be the difficult way to heaven.

The temptation to be sensational

The second temptation we often go through is the temptation to be popular, to be successful, to be seen. But, no. We are building up not our worldly kingdoms but the Kingdom of Christ. Christ rejected the temptation to throw Himself down from the pinnacle in order to show us that we must not build His Kingdom by sensational means, but by the witness of our faith.

Obscurity and humility are the foundation stones of His Kingdom. Therefore, we must constantly reject the illusion that we can win the crowd for Christ by means of our worldly popularity and success. Christ's

increase is proportionate to our decrease. The more my ego decreases, the more Christ increases in me and in others.

The temptation to power and wealth

Lastly, Christ's rejection of the riches, splendor and glory displayed before Him is a lesson. Riches. Money and what it can buy. Too often lying, cheating, injustice, cruelty, even killing, are resorted to just to build up one's bank account. With money goes the desire to amass power and to remain in power even if one has rendered himself unworthy or incapable.

Unless we are free from temporal cares and self-seeking, we cannot play a dynamic role in the apostolate. It is not in the world's wealth and power that our strength lies. We must re-discover ourselves in Christ who alone is our wealth and power. Worldly wealth and power are not necessarily signs of active membership in the Church; all too often they constitute a great obstacle to the apostolate.

These are the temptations we all go through in life. They constitute the obstacles to the apostolate. They retard the spread of the Kingdom in us and in the world. To overcome them is indeed to share in the victory of Christ.

II IN QUADRAGESIMA (February 19)

THE TRANSFIGURATION: A CALL TO PURITY

Christ brought Peter, James and John with Him into Tabor in order to strengthen their faith. He wished to arm them in advance against the scandal of the cross, because He foresaw that they would soon be witnesses of His abasements and weakness. He would be lifted up on a cross; His Body would be spurting out blood; He would be transfixed with nails; He would be hanged between two thieves. In order that these might not be an occasion of their falling away, He showed them His glory. On this mount He was lifted off the earth; from His Body spurted out golden rays; He was transfigured with splendor; He

hovered between Moses and Elias. A fitting revelation of His future triumph on that early Easter morning! By means of this Transfiguration Christ prepared the three for the cross and the crucifixion.

A revelation of our transfiguration

But we are interested more in what this mystery holds for us today. This Gospel is truly a wonderful message of hope, for it discloses to us the message of this season of Lent. It shows us where Christ leads those who share with Him His sufferings through the crucifixion of their flesh: like Him they will be glorified.

The glory which surrounds Jesus in the Transfiguration will be ours. It is a revelation of our future transfiguration. This is just a foreshadowing for "it has not yet appeared what we shall be." (I Jo. 3/2) But we know herebelow that our bodies will be glorious like unto His own upon Thabor, because according to Him, the just shall "shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt. 13/43). We shall, therefore, share in the glory which shone forth in Him. St. Paul expressly tells us so: "But our citizenship is in Heaven from which also we eagerly await a savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will refashion the body of our lowliness, conforming it to the body of His glory" (Phil. 3/21).

To live in the spirit of Lent is not just to be lost in our mortifications, fastings, abstinence and almsgiving. It is to look towards the future. The account of the Transfiguration this morning is intended to give finality to the little crucifixions to which we submit our bodies.

Purity and holiness

We mention the word *crucifixion*, for we are not meant to merely hope for our transfiguration in Christ. The Epistle shows us how we may crucify, and thus transfigure, our bodies. How? Through purity and holiness. God is calling us to holiness. It is His will that not only our souls but also our bodies must radiate holiness.

If we want our bodies to shine as the sun, if we want them to be glorious like unto Christ's, then we must heed St. Paul: that is,

abstain from every sort of immorality, especially impurity (Cf. I Cor. 5/11; 6/9, 13, 15-20; I Tim. 1/10). We must learn how to possess our bodies ("vessel") in holiness and honor. Let none transgress or overreach his brother by means of adultery. "For God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."

This, my dear brethren, is what the mystery of Christ's Transfiguration holds for us right now. Through the progressive control of our bodies, we prepare ourselves for our future transfiguration,

III IN QUADRAGESIMA (February 26)

DECIDING FOR CHRIST

"He who is not with me is against me." The greatest decision we can make in life is the decision for Christ. It is too bad that many postpone it to the time of their death, when it is most difficult to make decision. I am reminded of a priest who asked a dying man "Are you sorry for all your sins?" The dying man answered, "I sure am very sorry, Father." But when the priest said "Do you renounce Satan and all his works and all his pomps," the same dying man replied, "Father, I am not in the position to antagonize anyone now." That's the kind of decision we might make if we do not make up our minds now in favor of Christ.

Christ: the stronger

But let us decide for Christ, choose Christ right now and sustain this with a life lived in humility and truth. Satan is powerful only because we make him powerful with our sinfulness. In truth, he has no weapon other than those which we give him.

Christ came in order to wage an invisible war with Satan. He has every right over us. Satan, the liar *par excellence*, has none. Of the two Christ is the stronger. "When the strong man, fully armed, guards his courtyard, his property is undisturbed. But if a stronger than he

attacks and overcomes him, he will take away all his weapons that he relied upon, and will divide his spoils."

Christ is the stronger because "all power is given to Him" "in heaven, on earth and under the earth." Undaunted, he upholds salvation. He accepts defeat and death only to use them as propitiation for our sins. His defeat is truly a victory.

Uncompromising decision

If we choose Christ now, we can put all our trust in Him. His apparent weakness and vulnerability is no longer a scandal. He says to each of us, as He did to His disciples: "Take courage, I have overcome the world" (Jo. 16/33). "Now is the judgment of the world; now will the prince of the world be cast out" (Jo. 12/31). To the extent that our decision for Christ is uncompromising, we shall cast out Satan from the world. To the extent that our surrender to Christ is unconditional, we shall dominate Satan. This decision then must be honest, else it is no decision at all.

Avoid occasions of sin

How can we sustain our decision? By "imitating God" and "walking in love." We render Satan weaponless by removing sin from our lives. We must get down to the root of our sin, if we do not want the same to keep recurring; it will weaken us more each time and eventually conquer (Cf. Mt. 11/24-26).

Truly this decision is going to hurt. The change is not going to be fun. For often the most deeply rooted sins are occasioned by persons, places, and things to which we are so strongly and passionately attached and drawn. And yet how can we be so attached to them and still not be separated from Christ? There is no third alternative. Either Christ or Satan. And we must decide for Christ.