

PASTORAL SECTION

HOMILETICS

● John Maguire, C.S.S.R.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER (May 4)

“It is expedient for you that I go; for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you.” (Jn. 16.1)

Jesus Christ had worked tremendous changes in His disciples by His presence, but His work in this world was now almost complete, and he tried to explain to them now that it was necessary that he return in His Father. Not only was it necessary, but it would benefit them. The Apostles had listened daily to His words, they had eaten with Him, they had been most impressed by the wonderful example He gave them in meaningful living. They could not see how they would be helped by His departure. They could not see the tremendous effect that would come upon the world from the establishment of the Church. They could not know that only when Christ had ascended into heaven, could He reach the whole world through the members of the Church. They could not understand these things and therefore they were sad. But Jesus said to them, “It is expedient for you that I go.” And we know how true these words were. As St. John later wrote; “The Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

If Jesus Christ was alive to-day, and living in the world; where would he be? He might be living in Palestine. He might be living in Rome. He could even be in Manila. But wherever He was, he would be in contact with only a few people. If we wished to see Him; if we wished to talk to Him, we would have to make a journey to

Palestine, to Rome, or wherever He might be at that particular time. On the other hand, now that Jesus Christ is in Heaven, at the right hand of His Father, He works through His Church. If we wish to visit Him we can do so at any time of the day or night. If you go to any provincial town, there, in the Church, or barrio chapel, anywhere in the world, there into your midst comes Jesus Christ Himself.

But this is only the beginning of the fruits of Jesus Christ's Ascension into Heaven. When he went to Heaven he sent the Holy Spirit into the world. Now the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of every Christian. If you meet a poor man in the street and you give him one peso, you are giving that peso to God, for God is present in that man. If you help the poor, visit the sick, the imprisoned, *anything* that you do for someone else you are doing it for God. God is present in the poor, in the sick, in the prisoner. You cannot walk down the streets of Manila without meeting God; he is present in the heart of every true Christian. He is everywhere waiting for us to do things for Him. And all of this because He ascended into Heaven. If he had returned to His Father in Heaven, this would not be so. If He had not gone the Holy Spirit would not have been sent.

There is one other thing that we should remember. When we love God, then God is in us. If we are good Christians, if we are honestly striving to do what God wants, then God is our companion at every moment of the day and night. And what does this mean for us? It means that we are never alone, never, because God is always there. It means that if we are sad, we have God to comfort us. It means that in the time of temptation we have God to help us. It means that even if we have no friends in this world, we still have God, to help us, to comfort us, to strengthen us. There is no reason to fear, God is our strength. There is no reason to be sad, God is our comfort. There is no likelihood of our committing sin, if we're really aware that God is there inside us.

In a distant barrio of the Philippines a few years ago, a priest instructed the children, so that they could go to confession and Holy Communion. None of the children had received Holy Communion before, so the priest was very careful to teach them the importance of the Sa-

crament that they were to receive. On the day of their first Communion, after they had received Communion, one little girl refused to talk to anyone. When the teachers tried to get her to speak she ran away and sat by the side of the river. The teacher went and asked the priest if he would talk to the little girl. He did. But she would not answer. He tried for a long time and then he said "why do you refuse to talk to anyone to-day? You should be very happy, because you have received God into your heart this morning." The little girl replied, "Yes, I received God this morning, and I am not going to talk to anyone else, but God, for the rest of the day." That little girl said more than any priest can ever say in a sermon. God is with us in a very special way when we receive Holy Communion. He is with us especially during the Mass but if we love God, He is with us always.

The Apostles could not understand why Jesus Christ said "It is better for you that I go—" We can understand. We can see that Jesus was right when he said "It is better for you that I go." Let us ask Mary, the Mother of God, to remind us continually that God is with us.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER (May 11)

"If you ask the Father anything in My Name, He will give it to you." . . . "Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full." (Jn. 16.23)

A few years ago, there was a beautiful article in a Catholic magazine. It was written by a woman, the mother of seven children. It was written very simply, as such a mother would speak. This is what it said. "Last month my ten year old son became very sick. He had to go to the hospital, for the doctor said that he had meningitis. We did not know what to do. So we prayed. I gathered my children around me and I said to them, 'Jimmy is very sick. We must ask God to make him better.' After a while we were all praying most of the day. Going around the house I would talk to God, asking him to help us. The doctors said that Jimmy would die, but I did not think so, because,

all day I could hear my three year old daughter whispering to herself; "Jimmy is sick; please, Jesus, make him better. God be good, and make Jimmy better." Yesterday Jimmy came home, completely cured. Now I know as I have never known before that God is always listening. For the last few weeks. I have often had no hope, except when I talked to God. And I often asked myself, "What would I do if I was a pagan—What would a pagan do?"

You should thank God every day, my dear brethren, that you have been born into a Christian home. You know that God loves you, you know that He died because he loves you. You know that He sent the Holy Spirit into the world, to teach and comfort us, because He loves us. You know that this same God Who loves us so much has said, "Ask the Father anything in My Name and He will give it to you—ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full."

There are people who say: "I cannot avoid sin." Do these people doubt the words of Jesus Christ Himself? Do they not know that He has said, "Ask the Father *anything* in My Name and He will give it to you." There are others who will say; "I cannot keep away from this occasion of sin, or from this sinful companion." Are they pagans? Have they forgotten that God loves them so much, that He has said. "Ask the Father ANYTHING in my name and He will give it to you?" Then there are people who say: "I cannot pray, I never feel like praying, I am always distracted." Are these people unable to talk? God did not tell them to feel fervent. He did not tell them to clear their minds of everything else. He told them, "Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full."

If you can talk, then you can pray. Prayer is talking to God. If you want something from your neighbour, you know how to ask him. If you need something from God ask Him also. God could have given us everything that we need to get to heaven, but He did not, because he wanted us to ask Him for things. He wanted us to talk to him. He knew that if he gave us everything we would soon forget about Him, and He did not want that. He wanted us to talk to him. He wanted to show His love for us, by giving us the things that we asked for. He said "Ask the Father anything in my name—"

And when did He speak these words? He spoke them just before He died, so that we would not forget them. Many times in the sermons that He preached to the people He had said that we should pray, many times He had reminded us to ask, but at the Last Supper, before He went out to die, He repeated once again: "Ask". And this time he added "Ask in My Name", for He wanted us to know that after the Ascension, He himself, would be at the right hand of His Father in Heaven, to intercede for us, to add force to our prayers. In other words, when we ask the Father anything in His name, He Himself will ask for it, and therefore, we will certainly receive what we ask for.

When you have problems say to God, "Help me dear Jesus, Jesus, help me." When things go wrong, talk to God about them, tell Him your troubles and ask Him to help. He is interested in You. He wants you to talk to Him. He wants to help you. He loves You. There is no need to speak to God by means of formal prayer. Do what He has said, 'Ask.' "Ask and receive that your joy may be full." Let us ask Mary, the Mother of God to teach us how to talk to her Son, our Brother.

THIRD SUNDAY OF MAY—ASCENSION

"Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Mark. 16.15)

Jesus Christ gave these instructions to His Apostles, and they carried them out very well, as St. Mark tells us in His Gospel. "They going forth, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word, with the signs that followed. "The Apostles went where they could, spreading the message that God had given to them, but it was not possible for them to go everywhere, and their lives were only short, so that it is easy for us to see that these words were meant, not only for the Apostles but for their successors. All the Bishops of the Church to-day are continuing this work, all the priests of the world are helping them, and in a different way, every Christian

in the world must play his part in carrying out the command of Christ. "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature." I say in a different way, for it is not your obligation to preach the word of God from the pulpit, yours is the task of proclaiming the same Gospel, by word and deed, in every action of your life. Whether in the factory, in the office, in the streets, or in your own home, you must lead a Christian life, so that everyone that you meet, can see that you really believe in God, really love Him, and that you live according to that belief.

When Jesus gave His command to the Apostles, it could only be carried out by speaking, even printing had not yet been invented. There was no Radio, no telephone. The only way that they could spread the Word of God was by speaking. But now, that has changed. God has given us many wonderful gifts, especially in the field of Communications. He has given us these things to help us, and in order that we might help other people. To-day has been proclaimed by the Bishops of the Philippines, "Social Communication" Day. Today we should think about the wonderful gifts that God has given to us, the many wonderful conveniences that we have, that people one hundred years ago did not have. We have television, telephone, radio, satellite communications, it may not be very long before there is a man on the moon sending back messages to the earth. These are wonderful things, and they have been made possible by the cooperation of man's efforts with the gifts of God. And God is very happy about these things. But like all gifts of God, they can be used for good or evil. Ours is the obligation to see that these things are used for good.

If you are the owner of a newspaper, a television producer, an editor, a journalist, then you have at your disposal a tremendous power for good or evil. But most of us do not have this power. What then can we do to improve the effects of the Social Communications in the world to-day? There is a lot that we can do. It is very well known that if no-one likes a radio programme, it does not survive for long. If nobody watches a certain television show it will be short-lived. If you ask any advertising expert, he will tell you that the owners and operators of television know exactly when the most peo-

ple are watching their programmes. This means that you and I really control these programmes. Every time you turn off a programme that is no good, you are helping to kill that programme. Your part may be a very small one, but it is a very real one.

Every time you buy a newspaper or refuse to buy a certain newspaper, you are effecting the future of that newspaper. If no one wants to read a certain magazine, it is already going out of print.

Now how can we decide what programmes we should watch, what magazines we should have in our homes? How can we decide whether a programme that we are viewing or listening to, is worthy of Christians? We can decide very simply; just ask yourself from time to time. "If Jesus Christ came to visit us to-night, would we have to turn off the television, or would He sit down with us and watch this programme? If Jesus came to see us, would we have to throw out some of the magazines and comics that are now on the table in the living room? Would we be able to read to Him the article that we are now reading in this newspaper? Would I have to get someone to talk to Jesus at the door, while I removed the magazines and comics, changed the programme on the television, turned off the radio, or got rid of the friend with whom I was gossiping on the telephone? If I would have to do any of these things, then I am not doing what God expects of me. I am not carrying out the command of Christ to spread His message to the world. I am not the living example to the world of the message of Christ that I should be. I am not doing what God wants me to do. Remember what you do may not be much, but if you do not do it, the Gospel of Jesus Christ will take a little longer to spread to the rest of the world. Jesus Christ is depending on you to help Him. Don't let Him down. God has helped man to produce many things, many wonderful things, for entertainment, for enjoyment, and communication. Let us do our part to see that these things are used for good and not for evil.

Let us pray every day to the Mother of God, that she will help us to use the gifts of God, for the purpose for which they were intended by God.

PENTECOST (May 25)

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you.” (Jn. 14.26).

St. Peter was not a brilliant man. He probably never went to school. He knew a lot about fishing. He probably did not know much else before He met Jesus Christ. When Jesus was being tried before the High Priests in Jerusalem, Peter denied that he knew Him, because he was afraid that he too would be executed. We read in the Gospels, that St. John was at the foot of the Cross, also Mary Magdalene, but no mention is made of Peter. He was not there. When Jesus Christ was in most need of comfort, Peter was not there, he was afraid, he was ashamed to be known as a friend of Jesus. And yet this same Peter, who was afraid of the soldiers, ashamed that he might be recognized as a man different to any other, unlearned, hopeless in public relations, stood up in the midst of the crowds on the first Pentecost Sunday, and preached to them. And what did he say? Did he apologise, did he speak in praise of them? No! This is what he said; “Men of Israel, listen to this! Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did through Him in the midst of you, as you yourselves know Him, when delivered up—you have crucified and slain by the hands of wicked men. God has raised Him up.” The fact that St. Peter could preach such a sermon, to the very men who had crucified Christ is extraordinary, but we read further in the Scriptures, that as a result of this sermon, three thousand people received his word and were baptized.

Why could St. Peter, who a few days before had been so afraid, so unlearned, suddenly become a great preacher, and deliver one of the most sensational sermons of all time? Because he had received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit foretold by Jesus Christ. Who will teach you all things, and this same Holy Spirit is in your hearts and souls this morning. Will you say: “I cannot avoid sin,” when you have this same Holy Spirit to show you how? Will you say: “I do not have the strength to break with these bad companions,” when you have the Holy Spirit, to strengthen you, the same Holy Spirit, Who gave St. Peter

the strength to overcome his shame? Will you say: "I am ashamed to appear different to other people", when you have the Holy Spirit to strengthen you?

You, my dear brethren, are Christians, yours is a special life, you must be a shining example to the world of the teachings of Christ in practice. If you are to be a good Christian then you must suffer, from the world, from temptations, perhaps from your own friends and relations. But you have the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, with you always. He will help you to understand that yours is the true happiness. Yours is the happiness of knowing that you are doing what God wants you to do, and that whatever happens to you, God will be there to help. You are not worried by the false teachings of the newspapers and public opinion, because you know that the Holy Spirit will show you the truth. You are not afraid of having too many children although others are telling you that you should be practising sinful birth-control, because you know that the Holy Church has laid down very explicitly what the conduct of Christians should be, and Jesus Christ told us that the Holy Spirit would be with the Church for all time to teach it the truth. You are not ashamed to act as a christian in company-keeping, because you know that although the world of movies and magazines has a different code of action, you are right. Even if all your friends are acting differently you will not be affected by them, you will not be ashamed to do what God wants, because you have the Holy Spirit to help you. Whatever difficulties come up in your life you will be able to ask yourself. "What would Jesus Christ want me to do in this case?" And you will not be afraid to act, because the Holy Spirit is there strengthening you. Yours is the wonderful vocation of showing to the world, by your example, what a true Christian should be. Yours is the happiness of knowing that God is on your side. Yours is the life of love, love of God, the life which no-one can take away from you because the Holy Spirit will be there to help you. He will teach you all things and bring to your mind, at the right times, the teachings of Christ. He did this for St. Peter, and He will do it for you; that is why He was sent into the world.

Let us pray each day to the Mother of God that she will give us a love and awareness of the Holy Spirit, who is always with us to help us.