

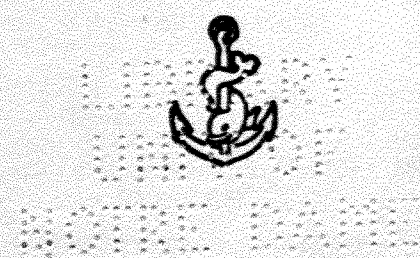
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"Ut Ecclesia aedificationem accipiat."
I COR. 14: 5.



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THE ECCLESIASTICAL REVIEW

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THE PREACHING OF CHRIST.

WAS Jesus Christ an orator? It was not necessary for Him to be one. He came to die for man and secondly to teach him. He could have done both these things without oratory. But all available evidence indicates that He was a great orator.

In fact, if there is anywhere loveliness in this world, it is found in the character of Jesus Christ; and if any power in words, it is His Gospel. The priest must turn first to Him for instruction in preaching. It requires no apostolic love, nor devotion of a disciple to appreciate His mastery of thought and diction. A none too willing world acclaims them. Why? Because He said great things well; said them clearly, briefly, convincingly; said them powerfully and often beautifully. Not that He made oratory His goal, or surrendered to mere showy arts or to meretricious ornaments of rhetoric. His eloquence was homely yet majestic, cogent yet reserved, simple as well as sublime. That the pitifully incomplete record of His sayings rings with power and charm alone proves that.

From the beginning of His public life, when in the synagogue at Nazareth, He said, "Today is fulfilled the Scriptures in your ears," to His last dying word on the Cross, we find He uttered no trivial word, expressed no dull platitude. We may justly infer, too, that Jesus possessed a charm of voice and grace of manner consonant with the perfect Man He was, and with the dignity, simplicity and courtesy inherent in the Divine Personality. "No man spoke like this man." To have heard Him speak has been the dream of every Christian preacher since the Apostles.

But what more definitely are the qualities and traits of our Lord's preaching?

We must remember, as I have said, that the record is pitifully incomplete. Many divine lessons lingered in the Evangelists' minds only in larger outline, their details blurred by time and the rigors of apostolic life. In telling the story, they overlooked a hundred details we would have rejoiced to know:—the tone of voice, the telling glance or gesture, that illumined an obscure thought. The greater part of what He said was never written, and what was recorded suffered, as all oratory does, by being consigned to cold print, and by translation into foreign tongues.

The first prominent trait we observe is that when teaching He employed the simplest terms, spoke of ordinary occupations and events of daily life, and gathered analogies and comparisons from the world of nature and common experience. He talked to fishermen of their nets, to husbandmen of their fields and the fruits thereof, to townsmen of their houses and streets. His allusions were always well known to His listeners, dealing with things they saw, handled or dealt with frequently, as the weather, wine-skins, taxes and salt. His language was figurative but clear, colored, but precise; homely, in the original sense of the word, but beautiful. He drew simple pictures using the objects:

Rocks	Houses	Oxen	Men
Trees	Money	Sheep	Women
Flowers	Bread	Birds	Clouds
Fruit	Garments	Pearls	Rain
Streams	Candles	Barns	Lightning

Although simple, these pictures were exquisitely wrought, every stroke of the brush was clear; there was none too many, and none was wasted.

With a command of the whole range of language, and all the philosophies, Christ's figures of speech and illustrations were such as these:

Vines and vineyard	Bride and bridegroom
Sheep and shepherds	Father and children
Sower and seed	Life and death

King and kingdom	Light and darkness
Fishermen and the sea	Health and sickness
Masters and servants	Hunger and thirst
Army and soldiers	Harvest and reapers.

For example, see how clearly and yet artfully He worked out the figure of the vine in John 25: 1-8:

I am the true vine; and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he will purge it that it may bear more fruit. Now you are clean by reason of the word I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine: You the branches; he that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. If anyone abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you. In this is my Father glorified; that you bring forth very much fruit, and become my disciples.

A remarkable feature of His preaching was His constant use of figures of speech. Not that it was strange for Him to use the metaphor and the parable among imaginative, figure-loving orientals. St. Jerome, who lived amongst them said: "It is common among Syrians, and especially Palestinians, to add parables to their every lesson; so that what cannot be comprehended by the listeners through simple instruction, may be grasped through comparison and examples."¹

Christ was speaking to the world. It might therefore surprise us to find many of His most solemn commands and revelations expressed in figures. Probably the depths and magnificence of mystical truths can only be adequately reached by figurative language. Explaining the necessity of Baptism, for example, He said: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost he cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Announcing His impending Passion: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling in the ground die, it remaineth alone. But if it die it bringeth forth much fruit."
—John 12: 24, 25.

¹ Comment. Matt. XVIII, Lib. 5.

The momentous choice of Peter as chief of the Apostles was made known in these words: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."—"Feed my lambs; feed my sheep." This is all imagery of the brightest sort, yet clear and profoundly expressive.

A favorite type of sermon was the parable. The parable is a story and a comparison, a similitude, which stimulates the mind to search for a hidden meaning or application. It is a lesson whose truth is embodied in a tale. The Good Shepherd, The Prodigal Son, The Sower and the Seed are the titles from the world's greatest set of sermons, our Lord's parables.

The parables of the Gospel number about seventy. Our Lord propounded them not according to any system that we can see, except that they are a description of the Kingdom of Heaven, its members and their obligations. Here is a list of them:

The Sower
 The Seed
 The Tares or Cockle
 The Mustard Seed
 The Leaven
 The Hidden Treasure
 The Pearl of Great Price
 The Fishing-net
 The Harvest and Laborers
 The Bridegroom and Wedding Guests
 The Old Garment and Wine-bottles
 The Old and New Wine
 Wayward Children
 Real Defilement
 Uprooted Plants, Blind Leaders
 The Children and the Dogs
 The Kingdom of Christ, Kingdom of Satan
 The Laborers in the Vineyard
 The Two Sons
 The Wicked Husbandman
 The Marriage of the King's Son
 The Great Supper
 Signs of the End
 The Body and the Eagles

The Barren Fig Tree
 The Good Tree and the Bad
 The Pharisee and the Publican
 The Last Place at the Feast
 Poor Guests
 The Rich Fool
 The Vigilant Servants
 The Thief in the Night
 The Faithful Steward
 The Ten Virgins
 The Closed Doors
 Unprofitable Servants
 The Good Samaritan
 The Five Talents
 The Pounds
 The Unjust Steward
 The Rich Man and Lazarus
 Serving Two Masters
 The Unmerciful Servant
 The Mote and the Beam
 Pearls Before Swine
 The Son Who Asked for Bread
 The Friend Coming at Night
 The Unjust Judge
 The Two Debtors
 The Salt of the Earth
 The Lamp on its Stand
 The City on the Mountain
 The Builder
 The King at War
 The Disciples, Servants, Household
 The Prudent Householder
 The House Built on a Rock, on Sand
 The Light of the World
 The Grain of Wheat
 The Vine
 The King's Son and the Tribute
 The Physician
 The Good Shepherd
 The Lost Sheep
 The Lost Coin
 The Prodigal Son

It is an interesting list and reveals how extensively our Lord used the story in His teachings. We are aware, of course, that He used this form of lesson, not only to teach His disciples, but sometimes also to teach only His disciples. Their veiled meaning, which He disclosed later to His friends, confused His enemies, allowing Him time to organize His Church, and pursue His course of instruction without violent interruption until the end.

Three parables, taken almost at random, reveal His style of preaching. First, the Good Shepherd. It is the Baptist, the most austere of the Prophets, who describes Jesus and His mission in the loveliest imagery. John calls Him the Lamb of God, and the Bridegroom of the race, two figures capable of most consoling development. Jesus Himself gives us a third, the Good Shepherd.

Of all the parables, probably the most universally appealing are the Good Shepherd and the Lost Sheep. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Any reference to sheep is likely to be understood in nearly every part of the world. Sheep are raised in nine-tenths of its countries. There is no State, for example, in these United States, which has not its grazing flocks. Besides, the figure itself is engaging. The world, from the day Christ uttered it, seized upon it as its favorite characterization of our Saviour. There were one hundred and fourteen pictures of the Good Shepherd in the catacombs. Ancient Christian art represented Christ, the Good Shepherd, in one hundred and fifty ways. There is no telling how many modern concepts have been added to these. Wherever Christianity has penetrated, the allusion is classic.

The Jewish inhabitants of Palestine to whom Christ preached the parables understood Him perfectly. Sheep-raising, together with cultivation of vineyards and olive groves and fishing, formed their chief occupation. It was so even in the time of the Patriarchs. The herdsmen of Abraham and Lot quarreled over their great flocks, which this same land was not "able to bear". Joseph's Brethren told Pharaoh, "We thy servants are shepherds;" and David tended sheep in the very field where a thousand years later shepherds "were keeping the night watches over their flock", on the first Christmas night.

The image was venerable with age and hallowed by use long before Christ identified Himself as the Good Shepherd. The Prophets Ezechiel and Micheas used the figure, and David in the Psalms. In fact God had already announced the coming of the Messiah under the beautiful image of the Shepherd.

Furthermore, the figure was much more expressive to these Syrian followers of Judaism than it might be to us. Their lives were simpler, and their few possessions, as sheep, of greater concern. Usually the farthest horizon of their lives were the neighboring hills, the desert of the adjacent sea; and their interests centered around their homes, their sheep, the olive groves and vineyards, fields of wheat, and their synagogue. Their idea of magnificence was the Temple in Jerusalem, and their dream of luxury was a piece of cloth twice-dyed in Tyrian purple. They had few worldly contacts other than these, no complex civilization, and assuredly no scientific diversions such as amuse our day. In the simplicity of their existence, sheep were sometimes their companions, with whom association was almost unbelievably close. It was a Palestinian shepherd whom the Prophet Nathan described in his parable preached to King David:

But the poor man had nothing at all but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up, and which had grown up in his house together with his children, eating of his bread and drinking of his cup, and sleeping in his bosom: and it was unto him as a daughter.—II Kings 12: 3.

With these facts in mind we can comprehend the eloquence of these two parables.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Amen, amen I say to you: He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up another way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and he leadeth them out. And when he hath let out his own sheep, he goeth before them; and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. But a stranger they follow not, but fly from him, because they know not the voice of the stranger.

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This proverb Jesus spoke to them. But they understood not what he spoke to them. Jesus therefore said to them again:

Amen, amen I say to you: I am the door of the sheep. All others as many as have come are thieves and robbers: and the sheep heard them not. I am the door. By me if any man shall enter in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in, and go out, and shall find pasture.

The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they may have life and have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep. But the hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and flieth because he is a hireling: and he hath no care for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd: and I know mine and mine know me. As the Father knoweth me and I know the Father: and I lay down my life for my sheep. And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.—John 10: 1-16.

THE LOST SHEEP

And He spoke to them this parable, saying:

What man of you that hath an hundred sheep: and if he shall lose one of them, doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which was lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, lay it upon his shoulders rejoicing: and coming home call together his friends and neighbors, saying to them: "Rejoice with me because I have found my sheep that was lost." I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine that need not penance.—Luke 15: 3-7.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, on the other hand, is without metaphor. It is a simple tale, whose simplicity accentuates the intense feeling contained therein. No one can miss its scathing rebuke to complacent goodness, nor mistake its magnificent conclusion. If pride is our greatest sin, we may be consoled in that the exaltation of the humble is our favorite tale. Here is perfect drama, brief, clear, with the point exquisitely turned. Better this parable than a hundred definitions of pride, or a dozen discourses on humility. It strikes home to every one, either the one way or the other.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

And to some who trusted in themselves as just, and despised others, he spoke also this parable:

Two men went up into the temple to pray: the one a Pharisee, the other a Publican. The Pharisee standing, prayed thus within himself: "O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this Publican. I fast twice in a week: I give tithes of all that I possess."

And the Publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven; but struck his breast, saying: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."

I say to you, this man went down into his house justified rather than the other, because everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—Luke 18: 9-14.

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, devoid of figures, is likewise straight narrative, unadorned. As Christ draws the picture, we sense the drama aroused by associated ideas. Dives feasted every day. (The average Syrian of that day rarely feasted, and occasionally did not dine at all.) He was clothed in purple and fine linen. The Tyrian purple is a deep crimson dye, a gorgeous color, expensive as it was famous. A pound of wool dyed in it was worth, in those days, the equivalent of two hundred dollars. Lazarus, in contrast, is in rags; an object of pity even to the dogs, who lick his sores.

DIVES AND LAZARUS

There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen: and feasted sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no man gave to him; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died; and he was buried in hell.

And in hell, lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom: and he cried, and said: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame."

And Abraham said to him: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil

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things, but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is fixed a great chaos: so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither."

And he said: "Then, Father, I beseech thee, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments."

And Abraham said to him: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." But he said: "No, Father Abraham, but if one will go to them from the dead, they will do penance." And he said to him: "If they listen not to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."—Luke 16: 19-31.

Thus our Lord taught, varying His illustrations. An observation of His style reveals that His method of teaching was not the philosophical process of ordered reasoning; much less was it the critical dissection of the Law, practised by the rabbis of His day, the swallowing a camel and straining out a gnat; nor was it oratorical. Christ's style of preaching, in general, was homiletic, that is, simple, informal, expository. He repeated the lessons again and again, under different guises, changing the figures. The Kingdom of God becomes the "leaven in the loaf", the "pearl of great price", which the merchant sold all to possess. The Apostles were the "salt of the earth", the "light of the world"; the Church, "a city seated on a mountain". The story of the Sower and the Seed describes the struggle of divine grace for recognition in the soul of man. The parables of the Talents, the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Laborers, depict the responsibilities of life and the certainty of judgment. Who ever synthesized the lesson of prudence better than Christ, in the phrase: "Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? By their fruits you shall know them!" Or pointed a moral so aptly as His words on prayer: "What man is there among you, of whom, if his son shall ask for bread, will he reach him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, will he reach him a serpent? Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you."

Another characteristic was the use of a terse summary at the end of His lesson, taking the form of a moral maxim, or

aphorism. These epigrams were always trenchant and often spiced with paradox; for example:

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, he is my brother and my sister and my mother.—Matt. 12.

Lay up to yourselves treasure in heaven: where neither the moth nor the rust consumes, and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.—Matt. 6: 20, 21.

He that findeth his life shall lose it; he that shall lose his life for me shall find it.—Matt. 10: 39.

So shall the last be first, and the first last.—Matt. 20: 16.

He had the ability to state a whole case in a few words: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?"

He spoke with confidence and "with authority," His hearers noted. Sometimes His language was strangely arresting, provoking wonder and curiosity; for example, His conversation with Nicodemus:

Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

How can a man be born again when he is old? . . .

Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.—John 3: 3-5.

Without courage and shrewdness the world would hardly respect Him, no matter how good He proved to be. Our Saviour's teaching was usually an exposition of doctrine, but when disputes were forced upon Him, as occasionally happened, the results, from the standpoint of dialectics, were interesting. In St. Luke's Gospel we read:

And it came to pass that on one of these days, as He was teaching the people in the temple, and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and scribes, with the ancients met together, and spoke to him saying: "Tell us by what authority thou dost these things?" Or, "Who is He that hath given thee this authority?" And Jesus answering, said to them: "I also will ask you one thing. Answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of man?" But they thought within themselves, saying: "If we

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shall say, From heaven; he will say: Why then did you not believe him? But if we say, Of men, the whole people will stone us: for they are persuaded that John was a prophet." And they answered that they knew not whence it was.

And Jesus said to them: "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."—Luke 20: 1-8.

Shortly after this these same Jewish leaders sent spies that they might trap Him in His words:

And they asked him, saying: "Master, we know that thou speakest and teachest rightly: and that thou dost not respect any person, but teachest the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or no?" But he considering their guile, said to them: "Why tempt you me? Show me a penny. Whose image and inscription hath it?" They answering, said to him, "Caesar's". And he said to them: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."—Luke 20: 21-25.

Still not resigned to their failure in debate with Him, some of the Sadducees came to Him with an astute question, about a woman who had seven husbands, one after the other:

In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? And Jesus said to them: "The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage, but they that shall be accounted worthy of that world, and of the resurrection from the dead, shall neither be married, nor take wives. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels."—Luke 20: 33-36.

Content at last to yield the field, they began to withdraw, saying, "Master, thou hast said well". And after that "they durst not ask Him any more questions". Jesus, however, was not ready to drop the argument. He said to them:

How say you that Christ is the son of David? And David himself saith in the book of Psalms: The Lord said to my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy enemies thy footstool. David then calleth him Lord, and how is he his son?—Luke 20: 41-44.

There is a sharp skirmish of wits in John 5, about the validity of the evidence of His miracles, wherein Christ replies, "I am come in the name of my Father, and you receive me not: if

another shall come in his own name, him you will receive"; and again in John 8, where He concludes a sublime vindication of His Divinity with, "Which of you shall convince me of sin?"

For simple minds He had simple words and figures. For example, see how patiently, and skilfully He drew out the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, confounding, yet saving her. For the Doctors of the Law He wrapt the grand theology of His Divinity in apt and illuminating phrases. For the poor unlettered throng He revealed the truth in homely phrases. The Pharisees' conceit He punctured with subtle argument. The humbled sinners He consoled in gentle parables.

His sharp logic, and prompt rising to the challenge of debate delighted His humble followers, while His gentle reasonableness reassured them. His words, at times, disarmed even His bitterest enemies. "Why have you not brought Him?", the Pharisees asked them who were sent to take Him prisoner. They could only reply, "Never man spake like this man."

There was no weakness in Christ's oratorical armor. He was kind to the kind, innocent to the innocent, and perverse to the perverse. He was consoling or majestic as occasion demanded; calm and subdued, or caustic and indignant as necessity prescribed.

No traveler leaving home was ever more consoling than Jesus in His last discourse to His Apostles:

Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many mansions. If not I would have told you: because I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself: that where I am you also may be.

If you ask me anything in my name that I will do. If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever. The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, nor knoweth him: but you shall know him: because he shall abide with you, and shall be in you.

I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you. Yet a little while: and the world seeth me no more. But you see me: because I live, and you shall live. In that day you shall know, that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you.

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If any one love me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid.—John 14.

The tender and affectionate discourse continues through John 15 and 16.

Nor is there in all literature a passage more transcendently majestic than Jesus' description, in prophetic language, of the tragic end of the world, and the ensuing pageantry of Judgment Day. No Christian reads it without trembling.

When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place: he that readeth let him understand. Then they that are in Judea, let them flee to the mountains: and he that is on the housetop, let him not come down to take anything out of the house: and he that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat. And woe to them that are with child and that give suck in those days. But pray that your flight be not in the winter or on the sabbath. For there shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be. And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh should be saved: but for the sake of the elect, those days shall be shortened.

Then if any man shall say to you: Lo, here is Christ, or there: do not believe him. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect. Behold I have told it to you, beforehand. If therefore they shall say to you: Behold he is in the desert, go you not out: Behold he is in the closets, believe it not. For as lightning cometh out of the east, and appeareth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Wheresoever the body shall be, there shall the eagles also be gathered together.

And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty.

And he shall send his angels with a trumpet, and a great voice: and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, and from the farthest parts of the heavens, to the utmost bounds of them. And from a fig tree learn a parable: when the branch thereof is now tender, and the leaves come forth, you know that summer is nigh, even at the doors. Amen, I say to you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass but my word shall not pass.—Matt. 24: 15-35.

Christ's indignation, though rare, could be devastating, as when

He began to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of his miracles, for that they had not done penance. "Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? Thou shalt go down, even unto hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, perhaps it had remained to this day.—Matt. 11: 20-23.

Or, when He beheld seated in the chair of Moses fawning hypocrites, devouring the houses of widows, the while praying long prayers:

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but within you are full of rapine and uncleanness. Thou blind Pharisee, first make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside may become clean.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you are like whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all filthiness. So you outwardly appear to men just; but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Fill ye up the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, generation of vipers, how will you flee from the judgment of hell?—Matt. 18.

Or, being forced to cauterize an infected wound:

But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged

about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come; but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.

And if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to go into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.

And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. It is better for thee, having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.—Matt. 17.

Thus Christ spread the Faith, along the roadside, by the sea, at the table of the rich Pharisee, at the bedside of the sick poor, on the Temple porch, sometimes in the synagogues, though their rulers were usually His enemies. He would gather a crowd at the public well, and speak to them of the living water of grace; lay hold of a ship and speak to the crowds lining the shore about the great net of Judgment Day; or halt the preparations for a funeral service, to speak of eternal life, and then raise the dead to life, to illustrate His text.

It was all extemporaneous, if we can apply that term to Christ's words, a seizing of the opportunity of the moment, the surroundings, and the inspiration of the scene, to reach and instruct His hearers. In language opportune and convincing, He painted supernal pictures His disciples were never to forget, revelations of the spirit world of unearthly beauty, all in the simple language of their daily lives.

Aside from a word of encouragement (Luke 10), and an occasional apostolic excursion, Christ apparently gave the Apostles no elocutionary or homiletic training, except, we must add, the supreme opportunity of listening to Him, a superb lesson indeed!

The Sermon on the Mount is the longest single address recorded by the Evangelists, with the possible exception of His Last Discourse to His disciples. The Sermon on the Mount, sometimes called a Code of Christ's teaching, is not a summary of the New Law. Learned commentators are inclined to believe that St. Matthew and St. Luke merely gave us a summary of one of Christ's many sermons, none of which differed funda-

mentally from this one; and that this was chosen as a more complete expression of the moral code of the Gospel. Its quick transitions of thought, the undeveloped parables, the closely strewn maxims, make it appear a résumé rather than a complete report of Christ's teaching that day.

Nevertheless, it is the most comprehensive sermon we have, and is a kind of orchestral prelude to the Gospel as a whole, containing a hint of its entire message. Incomplete though it be, it is the world's greatest sermon. We may well imagine the breathless interest with which the Israelites listened to those subversive words beginning:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake. Be glad and rejoice for your reward is very great in heaven.—Matt. 5: 3-12.

Here is a tone, a spiritual quality, far above any worldly wisdom: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?"—"Lay not up to yourself treasure on earth: where the rust and the moth consume."

It has often been observed, moreover, that neither by His words, nor style, nor by the use of contemporary subjects, did Christ confine His teaching to any one age. Marvelously He phrased His doctrine so that no word or expression in His Gospel binds Him to one generation. He is not only of Galilee, but of the world; not only of time, but of eternity. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say unto you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And of the grass of the field. . . . God doth so clothe: how much more you, O ye of little faith. Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you."—And so on.

And when He had ended, a great multitude followed Him down from the mountain, and "many were in admiration of His doctrine". "How came this man by all these things," they said, "and what wisdom is this that is given to Him." They saw in Him a Leader conscious of His supreme command, delivering His message with gracious ease and power, putting into His words some of the majesty of their mountains and the depths of their starry heavens. For all the world, He had succeeded in expressing in the crude medium of our language, some of the qualities of infinite Love and Loveliness. After all He is the Word of God.

But with all the transcendent beauty apparent in St. Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, we are painfully aware that only a hint or suggestion of Christ's real eloquence can be conveyed by printed quotations. There are depths we have scarcely sounded. However, there is much wisdom for the student of preaching in what we have been able to set down.

There are: His excellent simplicity and brevity, His common touch, the use of ordinary terms, the packed phrase and striking maxim. There is the use of colorful imagery, of story and parable, together with a considerable amount of dramatization. He chose the expeditious moment to reveal a truth, to make a charge. He built up a setting, or at least chose one for His announcements. He aroused interest, wonder, fear. He surprised and charmed people. He had the habit of exhibiting an idea under various guises, holding it up, turning it around for all to see. Above all we see in His preaching the gentle and patient repetition of spiritual lessons day after day. He was teacher, artist, father.

And in that last respect, it is important to realize that Christ's power over men did not consist merely in the excellence of His rhetoric or the quality of His voice. It consisted in that His words were truth and light. Sheer eloquence alone could never save the world. Without the spirit of Christ the greatest orator is but "sounding brass" and "tinkling cymbal".

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MEDITATION, SOUL ACTION.

I.

THE ROOT of Catholic Action in the community is immanent supernatural action in the individual soul. It is preëminently Christ-life vivifying each separate member of His Mystical Body, and all the members collectively, united as they are to one another and to their Head with the corporate unity of a single organism. Those who have been thinking according to the mind of the Church on this subject are in agreement that we have approached or deviated from the ideal of Catholic Action in proportion as we have approached or deviated from this supernatural concept of God acting in the soul. Moreover it is generally conceded that to foster this immanent supernatural action in the soul, mental prayer has an important and unique place. God's gift of grace to us is magnificent, yet always incomprehensible and mysterious.

Mental prayer, while it can never exhaust the knowledge of our supernatural life in God, can and should seek after the love of God in the inexhaustible treasure house of His Divine Life. It is alarming then to hear expressed so frequently and from sources that seem reliable the accusation that many diocesan priests do not meditate; for if they are not engaging in some form of mental prayer, then they are not in condition to lead their people into the fertile and promising land of supernatural Catholic Action. Of course there is no other Catholic Action.

I have no intention of commenting on the present state of mental prayer among priests. I hope that I would be the first to consider myself presumptuous and rash to do so. It is rather the purpose of this article to present certain phases of meditation or mental prayer in an attractive and helpful light in the hope that there may be some who will find in these few suggestions encouragement to continue their habit of mental prayer or to find renewed interest, if perchance mental prayer in the day's spiritual program has fallen into desuetude.

Difficulties frequently experienced by young priests in continuing their meditation at the time of their first assignment to parochial work arise from conditions quite common to their lives as diocesan priests and quite different from conditions found in the seminary where up to this time they have been