

Sermon Cords

Prayer In War-Time

By Rev James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

Here is a phenomenon: an entire column by a staff writer on the editorial page of The New York Times on the subject of prayer. If this be an indication of the trend of thought in war time, one may say that the war is not an absolutely unmitigated calamity. The writer of the column, "Topics of the Times," says it is not strange that "in days laden with grief and danger men should pray more than ordinarily."

The writer of that column also refers to a statement of Lincoln that is not so well known. It seems that on the eve of Gettysburg the President made what he himself calls "a solemn vow" to stand by God (I suppose he meant to be faithful to God) if God would stand by our boys at Gettysburg.

It is no doubt easy to find fault with that kind of bargain between man and God. It could be interpreted as an attempt to bribe God or to cajole Him, and there might possibly be in the back of one's head the idea of running out on God (so to speak) if God doesn't give us what we ask.

But let's get away from such sermonizing and come back to the fact reported by the writer in The New York Times. The fact is that the people, some of whom have not been too faithful to prayer when all went well with them and with their country, are now praying fervently and with faith. So much to the good.

In that newspaper column I find one idea that I have often used in speaking and writing especially to non-Catholics or to unbelievers "Simplicity for the time has replaced artificiality." How many times have we priests tried to get that truth into the heads of those who imagine they have reason-logical or psychological reasons for not praying.

The celebrated psychologist William James said in one of his books "Some people give us reasons why we should pray, others give us reasons why we should not pray, nobody seems to remind us of the real reason for prayer: we pray because we are made that way."

Now that the war is on, and later when the tragic facts of war will be brought nearer to us, we shall shed our sophistication and our artificiality. We shall get back to nature and back to God. We shall pray.

So, thanks to that writer in the Times. Thanks especially for his significant sentence, "Simplicity replaces artificiality."

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Five Years Ago--

—In the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From Feb. 18, 1937, Edition Missioners from home were met in the Orient by the Rev. John M. Duffy and the Rev. Leo C. Mooney of Rochester enroute around the world. It was told in a story sent by Father Mooney to the CATHOLIC COURIER by clipper mail.

As tension mounted in Mexico, Catholics forced the reopening of churches in Vera Cruz following the killing by police of two persons attending a clandestine Mass. At the same time hope was rising in Washington circles for settlement of the tense Mexico church question.

Completely redecorated and remodeled, St. Theresa's Church of Stanley was reopened with special services to mark its first anniversary.

Attorney Cornelius O'Dea, executive chairman of Elmira Catholic Charities, was named chairman of the annual Elmira Community Chest campaign.

The darkest hour in any man's life is when he sits down to plan how to get money without earning it.—Horace Greeley.

The beauty of Thy peace: that is good, and I am sure that the old lady in the picture, as well as the little fellow, knew what that peace was—a clean heart.—W. P., in Catholic Freeman's Journal.

STRANGE BUT TRUE

Little-Known Facts for Catholics

By M. J. MURRAY

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EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 18)

First in War. The enemy has assailed us in treacherous fashion, has found us so given to the constructive ways of peace that our material and human resources have not been sufficiently developed along war lines to match theirs.

But the spirit of George Washington still rules over America! His unflinching courage, his absolute trust in ultimate victory, are reflected today in President Roosevelt and in the might of America responding to his call to meet the foe.

May the Birthday of George Washington be the inspiration to all Americans to face the future bravely and intelligently. Absolute co-operation with our leaders in promoting the highest productivity of our industrial plants, the fastest development of tank and plane and ship, the quickest possible preparation of an army of free men ready and anxious to preserve for America that freedom first won for her by George Washington.

AND THE TEMPTER CAME

The devil knows when to tempt man. He comes when we are weakened, in spirit, when our defenses are down, when his appeal will sound most enticing.

So he came to Christ, when hunger showed its face after the fast of forty days and forty nights. The human nature of Christ was crying out for nourishment. No food, no drink, for forty days and nights: no answer to the body's lawful call for sustenance.

So Satan comes to us. He loves to find us weakened for his approach. In material temptations he may look to our human appetites and offer us the unlawful opportunity to meet their demands: he can not be bothered with any attempt to offer us such fulfillment of these appetites as is lawful.

But much more frequently does he approach us with spiritual temptations. He finds us hungry, because we have denied ourselves spiritual food. Forty days and nights have we fasted from things our souls need. Prayer has been absent, hearing of God's word has been avoided, meditation on His teaching wanting, reception of His Sacraments lacking: we are hungry, spiritually hungry, after avoiding all the spiritual food God places before us. Then the devil comes!

Other temptations Satan put before Christ: vainglory, lust for power, were suggested to Him. And the devil then as today is ready with words of Holy Writ to bolster up his temptations.

Lenten practices should help us meet Satan's temptations in the manner related of Christ in this Gospel for the First Sunday in Lent. His closing words may stand for us as a constant reply to every temptation: Begone Satan: the Lord God shall thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve!

Book Reports

By Rev. Benedict Ehmans

Introducing Father Francis X. Connolly's review of *Widowwept*, current best-seller by Mary Ellen Chase:

"Widowwept is clearly an attempt to define the American way of life through a biography of the Marston family and of their home, a lovely house set on an isolated head on the coast of Maine. Miss Chase has conjured an ideal family. Religious, tolerant, intellectual, they are far removed from the vices of the business world and the corruptions of the suburbs. They befriend a Bohemian family and help them to dig their roots in America's soil.

"For some reason not quite clear in the story itself, Miss Chase has Mother Radegund's niece, Adrienne, allegedly the victim of the laxity of World War I morals, give birth to a child in a convent. The circumstances are unreal to a literally ridiculous degree. Eventually the baby is deposited by Mother Radegund with her friends, the Marstons, an evidence, we presume, that nuns are broadminded and human. This unfortunate lapse . . . flows from the common American immaturity concerning sex. Miss Chase apparently felt that she was being dramatic when she was slightly sophomoric."

The *Commonweal* editors cannily gave Miss Chase's novel to a nun for review. Sister Mariella, O.S.B., returned a sympathetic report without taking the exception noted by Father Connolly. Of the convent phases of the book, she wrote:

"As memorable as the nuns in Kate O'Brien's *Land of Spices* is the charming humanist, Mother Radegund, conspicuously more intelligent than holy. Miss Chase knows her convents. Everything from the painstaking, unoriginal handwriting of sisters to the pros and cons of traveling with clergy-fare books has been accurately observed."

And that is all. Not a word, you see, about the incident which Father Connolly found so ridiculously unreal. I make no decision. But it seems to me that if a nun was not offended, we needn't balk about it.

Father Joseph McSorley reports on John Gunther's *Inside Latin America*: On the credit side colorful writing . . . often well informed.

On the debit side: (1) often superficial, exaggerated, inaccurate. (2) Latin American protests have already come in on the book's inaccuracies. (3) There is strong bias against the Catholic religion. The author favors the phrase "violently Catholic," and assumes that the crippling of Catholicism is a necessary preliminary to the complete rehabilitation of South America.

Comment: "Those Latin-Americans who are already disposed to entertain suspicions of the United States and to place more trust in the countries which helped Catholic Spain in her hour of distress, will not be reassured by the books of men like John Gunther." (From *The Catholic World*, December, 1941.)

A propos of Catholic Press Month, Peter Cosmon in the current issue of *Maryknoll's* excellent *The Field Ajar* gives us a timely reminder of the early history of Catholic defense by men of letters. Some of the world's first books written to spread the Christian idea, were: Justin Martyr, *Apology*, A. D. 150; Tatian, *Discourse to the Greeks*, A. D. 160; Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians*, A. D. 177; Theophilus, *Three Books to Autolycheus*, A. D. 180; Epistle to Diognetus, A. D. 190; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, A. D. 192; Tertullian, *Apology*, A. D. 197; Origen, *True Discourse Against Celsus*, A. D. 248; Lactantius, *Institutes*, A. D. 312; Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, A. D. 415-426.

"Let's stop defending. Let's take the lead!" That is Mr. Cosmon's plea to us Catholics. He proposes three avenues of action.

- 1--We must live. We must live richly and well our life of faith and good works. 2--We must talk. We must influence others by word of mouth. Nothing can strike first better than the human voice.

3--We must write or help to spread what is written. How about passing around your copies of the CATHOLIC COURIER, of the *Catholic Worker*, of whatever other Catholic magazines you get . . . among other less active Catholics . . . among non-Catholics. Be sowers of the seed that you heard about in the Gospel on Sexagesima Sunday. I don't know of any more exciting adventure than to plant good ideas in other people's heads, either by direct word or by broadcasting the printed word. Only God knows the final harvest of the good that He will gather from your sowing.

In this connection, Hilaire Belloc tells us the incident of a soldier in the last World War, with no brand of religion at all, who allowed himself to be court-martialed without revealing the guilty person, that he might shield an officer who was the father of a family, whereas he himself had no near relatives . . . and all, because one day in quarters he heard the Gospel of "Greater love than this no man hath . . . being read, and he took it to heart though he had no religious leaning at all. Such is the power of God's word. And it is in our keeping to spread . . . generously, every day."

Feast-Days

- Sunday, Feb. 22—ST. PETER'S CHAIR AT ANTIPOH. Monday, Feb. 23—ST. PETER DAMIAN. Tuesday, Feb. 24—ST. MATTHIAS, APOSTLE. Wednesday, Feb. 25—ST. WALBURGA. Thursday, Feb. 26—ST. NESTOR. Friday, Feb. 27—ST. GABRIEL. Saturday, Feb. 28—SS. ROMANUS AND LUPUS, BISHOPS.