

SUNDAY WORSHIP.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER XIII.

SECOND COMMANDMENT OF THE CHURCH.

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I. - ON THE PARISH MASS.

392. *The Huntsmen Surprised by a Storm.* -

The Church is a good mother, my friends; she does not disapprove of our taking salutary rest and moderate recreation on Sundays and holy-days; but it must never be at the expense of offices of obligation. St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, relates the following story on that subject: Two young men had made arrangements to go hunting on a festival day; only one of them had taken care to hear Mass before setting out. They were scarcely an hour out, when all of a sudden the sky grew dark, a fearful storm came on, accompanied with such terrific thunder and lightning, that it seemed as though it were the end of the world.

What frightened them most was, that amid that tremendous noise, they heard at intervals a voice of thunder, crying: *Strike! strike!* Meanwhile, the air becoming somewhat clearer, they began to recover from their fright and pursued their way. Suddenly the thunder pealed again with great fury

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and killed the one of the two huntsmen who had not heard Mass that morning. The other, terror-struck and quite beside himself, knew not whether to go on or turn back; whilst he was in this trouble and uncertainty, he heard again the same voice crying *Strike! strike the other, too!* He was ready to sink with terror, when another voice was heard saying these consoling words:

- "I cannot strike this one, because he heard this morning the *Verbum caro factum est* ('The Word was made *Flesh*')." You understand, dear children, that, by these words, which are the last of that part of the Gospel of St. John, read at the end of the Mass in accordance with the rubrics of Pope Pius V, the celestial voice meant to say that the huntsman had assisted at Mass. A good lesson, by which we shall try to profit, at need.

- RODRIGUEZ, *Practice of Christian Perfection*, IV, 354.

393. *Dumont's Royal Mass.* -

When one has had, like you, my friends, the happiness of being brought up Christianly, they find an inexpressible charm in the offices of the Church, which are so full, at once, of majesty and simplicity. The celebrated Cardinal de Cheverus, who was missionary in the United States, first Bishop of Boston, and afterwards Bishop of Montauban and Archbishop of Bordeaux in France, relates a thing that happened to himself. After having visited the Catholics of his mission, he repaired to the district of Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, inhabited by a multitude of savages, wandering here and there in the woods, without any fixed habitation, and spending all their time in hunting and fishing, Accompanied by

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a guide, he had journeyed for several days through a dark forest, when, on a Sunday morning, a great number of voices, singing in unison, was heard in the distance. M. de Cheverus stops a moment to listen, and, to his great astonishment, he distinguishes a hymn well known to him. He searches his memory for the strain, and soon perceives that those wandering children of the forest are executing Dumont's Royal Mass, which resounds through the churches and cathedrals of France on days of great solemnity. The scene was to him both touching and sublime; for what could be more touching than to see a savage people, who were fifty years without a priest, remaining faithful to the celebration of the Lord's Day! And then, what more sublime than those sacred songs, directed by piety alone, and resounding far off through the depths of a vast primeval forest! Cardinal de Cheverus was wont to say that he had never found anything so touching in his whole career as a priest and a missionary.

- HAMON, *Vie du Cardinal de Cheverus*.

394. *Napoleon at the Midnight Mass.* -

It were better, my friends, not to go to Mass than to behave there in an outrageously scandalous manner. By not going to Mass, you commit a grievous sin; but, by behaving very badly at Mass, you commit two: one, by not fulfilling the precept, the other, by the scandal given. It was in the first years of the Empire of Napoleon; on Christmas Eve, a lieutenant-general had some officers of rank and a marshal of France to dine with him.
Dinner

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being over, some one asks how they are to pass the rest of the evening. One of the guests answers carelessly and drunkenly: "Suppose we go to Midnight Mass." -- "So be it!" reply the others. They noisily enter the church of St. Roch. You may form an idea of the devotion of these officers, who went to church after a convivial dinner, merely by way of curiosity and pastime. Looking around, laughing, talking was all they did. But all at once appears a little man, wrapped in a large cloak. He resolutely approaches the merry group and says in a quick, authoritative tone: "Gentlemen, you are acting badly, very badly. When you come to church you ought to comport yourselves with propriety Respect and silence, gentlemen!" He said no more. That little man in the grey cloak was the Emperor Napoleon himself, who had come to assist at the Midnight Mass. You may imagine the astonishment of our officers when they had recognized him. It is unnecessary to add that during the remainder of the divine office not one of them so much as turned his head. These poor Christians did through fear of Napoleon what they ought to have done through love of God and the Infant Jesus.

- *Daily Rewards*, No. XXXV., 25.

395. *Four Hours' Journey to go to Mass.* -

You may already have heard the proverb: "The nearer the Church the farther from God." I dare not say, my young friends, that it is always true, but experience unhappily proves that it is too often so. In fact, we see persons who have but a step to go to church yet

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go very little, whilst others who are farther off never miss it. In the beginning of the present 19th century there was, in the parish of Roybon, near St. Marcellin, in the department of the Isere, in France, a family of working people, the head of which gave the greatest marks of sanctity. This poor man, named Antoine Ginien although he was some miles distant from the church, never failed to arrive there as one of the first, to assist at all religious exercises, and especially the parish Mass, which, in that village, was said very early in the morning. He was always sure to be there, too, on Lent-days and feasts of simple devotion. In the latter years of his life, it was not possible for him to go in winter, on account of the pains he had in his limbs; but, from Easter till it was near All Saints' Day, he got up sometimes only an hour after midnight, and journeyed slowly towards the church, supported by two crutches. He usually arrived there with time enough to hear Mass, but to do so he had to make a painful journey of four hours! What an example for those who will not assist at divine service in their parish church, though it would take them but a few minutes to get there, in order to discharge that most sacred duty! This holy old man died in the end of the month of December, 1809, at the age of seventy-five years.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, VI., 42.

396. *A Physician who does not go to Mass.* -

As I have already told you, my young friends, it is no uncommon thing to find simple peasants who reason with more intelligence and good sense than many

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proud, learned men, who foolishly presume on their little knowledge, and are not ashamed to be ignorant of the most simple truths of religion. Sometime ago I was told of a somewhat curious discussion which had taken place between a physician and a labourer who worked on his farm. The doctor accosted the worthy man, appearing surprised to see him in his Sunday clothes.

"Where are you going, that you are so well dressed, Lawrence?" he asked without further prelude.

-- "I am going to Mass."

-- "Bah! you would do better to stay at your work."

-- "Oh! sir, I never work on Sunday."

-- "You are a fool."

-- "Fool or no fool, I have made up my mind to that. I love religion, and I want to practise it, for it is it that makes me happy."

-- "It is the priests who have put such notions in your head."

-- "The priests never told me anything but what was right and for my good."

-- "Never told you anything but what was right! why, they have told you things that are absurd, and contrary to common sense."

-- "You may say what you like, doctor, but I think what they say is right."

-- "Well! now, how can a sensible man like you say that? Now! they have made you believe that there are three persons in one God?"

-- "Yes sir, and I believe it firmly, and I am ready to shed my blood rather than renounce that belief."

-- "It is all well enough to say that there is one God, one can believe that; but the idea of three persons in God! Did they go up to heaven to find that out?"

-- "When one has a headache sir, you say it comes from the

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stomach, and that an emetic must be taken; did you go down into the stomach to see the connection between it and the head?"

-- "Oh! but I studied that."

-- "Well! the priest studied, too!"

-- "Yes! but his study is limited to teaching you incomprehensible mysteries."

-- "Yet, they say, doctor, that there are incomprehensible mysteries in medicine too, though it is easier to know diseases and their remedies than the perfections of God, which are so far above us."

-- "It is true there are difficult things in diseases, but, at least, we cure the sick, and they are the better of our advice."

-- "I don't know, doctor, whether you always cure your patients; but I know I am always the better of the priest's advice. You admire the peace and order that reign in my family; the good conduct of my children.

Well! I owe all that to the advice and instructions of our pastor; it is not every one that could say as much, especially when they have no religion."

The doctor understood that these words applied to his son, whom he had brought up without religion, and who was giving him a great deal of trouble; he thought it most prudent to put an end to this dialogue, in which he had got the worst of it, and went away, muttering something to himself. As for you, children, I am sure you prefer the plain good sense of the religious farmer to the absurd reasoning of the irreligious doctor. I am of your opinion.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.* III., 33.

II. - VESPERS AND OTHER OFFICES.

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397. *A Basket of Water.* -

It is not enough to assist at Mass on Sundays and holy-days. Those days must be employed in works of piety and religion. Vespers, (the Divine Office,) Benediction, or Sermon, when there is one, are the best and most useful of all these works. Speaking of sermons, I have heard persons say: "Where's the use? I know all that will be said; it is only losing time." A hermit was one day complaining of the same thing to an ancient Father of the desert; he said that, no matter how attentively he listened to sermons, he soon forgot all he had heard, and that, consequently, it was useless for him to go to hear them. The monk to whom he addressed himself resolved to make him understand his error, in a sensible manner; he ordered him to go to a neighbouring fountain, and fetch some water in one of two baskets that were there. The good Brother immediately obeyed ; but eagerly as he sought to bring the water he had drawn, it all flowed away, of course, through the interstices of the basket, so that, by the time he reached where the father was, nothing remained. Nevertheless, he was obliged to make the attempt three several times. At last, the father ordered him to set down his basket beside the other, and said to him: "What change do you perceive in the basket with which you drew the water?" -- "None," answered the Brother, "except that it is cleaner than before." -- "Well! my good Brother, it is so with your mind. Even as this

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basket, although it did not retain the water you drew in it, is, nevertheless, cleansed, so your mind, although it does not appear to retain the word of God, is, nevertheless, cleansed thereby from the stains of sin. Let this example be for you a subject of encouragement and consolation; do not fail, then, to go to hear the sermons and instructions given in church; you will always derive some profit from them." - MICHEL-ANGE MARIN, *Vies des Peres des deserts. (Lives of the Fathers of the Desert)*

398. *Alexander the Great's Censer.* -

It is so natural, dear friends, to behave respectfully in the church in presence of the King of kings, that the pagans themselves, when they performed any ceremonies in the temples of their idols, might have served us as models. Is it not a shameful thing that we are less respectful in presence of God than they were before statues of wood or metal? St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, relates a story thereupon that will interest you. The famous Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia, was assisting one day at a solemn sacrifice, offered to I know not what false deity; perhaps it was to Jupiter, whom he had the foolish vanity to wish to resemble. Amongst the persons engaged in offering this sacrifice, there was, a young lad of twelve or fifteen years, who, with a censer in his hand, stood near the altar. At the most solemn moment, a burning coal fell on his arm, and he quietly bore the excruciating pain it caused him, for fear of disturbing the ceremony ever so little. At the end of some minutes, his burned flesh produced a suffocating

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smell, that must have incommoded those who were there; but the courageous boy endured all through an excessive and misplaced respect for that idolatrous sacrifice. Alexander the Great is said to have admired this truly heroic act ; but what most surprises me, my dear friends, is that we are so far from imitating this child, and that, for a mere nothing, we allow ourselves to become distracted and inattentive at the offices, sermons, and instructions of the Church.

- D. GENEVAUX, *Hist. Choix.*, 156.

399. *A Game of Tennis During Vespers.* -

Persons in high station find it hard to be resisted; their foolish pride goes sometimes so far as to put themselves on a par with God, and to complain when they are reminded of their duty in that respect. Let us pity these unhappy persons, dear friends, and take good care that we do not imitate them; otherwise, God has not abdicated His rights, and His turn will come. After a mission given in the island of Crete or Candia, St. Nicon repaired to the Greek mainland provinces, where the Lord made him venerable to high and low by his piety, and also by the gift of prophecy and by that of miracles. One Sunday, during Vespers, the governor of a small town, the name of which I forget, was playing at tennis in the public square, almost at the doors of the church. The holy missionary, offended by the tumult that was disturbing the service, went out of the temple and reprimanded the players pretty sharply without any respect for the presence of the governor named Gregory, a man subject to anger and ill temper.

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As he was losing his game, he got angry with the saint . . . and had him expelled from the city, neither more nor less!! When about to resume his game, he was suddenly stricken with paralysis, and felt the most excruciating pains all over his body. No remedies that he tried could relieve him. At last, after trying every means in vain, he was advised by the Bishop of the town to recall St. Nicon, and to ask his pardon for the bad treatment he had given him. Without a word of reproach for his former misconduct, the saint prayed for him, cured him, and made him one of his most zealous defenders against the enemies of virtue.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, II., 206.

400. *Shall we go to Vespers?* -

It is the will of God, dear children, that the whole Sunday should be employed in His service, sanctifying it by good works and assisting at divine service and enjoying legitimate recreation. He forbids on that day all unnecessary servile works and labours, and, still more, debauchery and illicit pleasures, which, of course are forbidden on every day of our lives. Hear the following story on this subject: In the first days of September, 1853, some young people from Rodez, in the department of Aveyron, in France, were drinking in a tavern, when the bell was heard calling the faithful to Vespers. One of them then proposes to go to church; but another, the sceptic of the village of Flavin, laughs at the idea, and proposes, on the contrary, to go "look for Vespers" in the river Viaur and thereby enjoy a swim instead. Both advices were followed, for some went to church, whilst others took their way to the Viaur. The one that had given the advice to go to bathe is the first

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into the river, still mocking and deriding those who had chosen to go to church; but, having had the imprudence to advance towards the gulf, an underwater shelf in the riverbed, he feels the sand going from under his feet, sinks down, down, and is drowned. It would probably have been the same with the others, had not one of them, seeing the danger, drawn back in time and held out to his companions a pole which he found on the bank. It was not till two hours after that the body of the unhappy drowned man was found. The bells which had invited him to go to Vespers, and whose warning he had despised, were heard again; but, alas! it was to ring his funeral knell and invite the faithful to pray for him. This death deeply impressed the inhabitants of the parish of Flavin, in which the accident occurred; most of the papers spoke of it. May this lesson be of service to us, dear friends!

- *Daily Rewards*, No. I., VI., p. 5.