

THE LATE FATHER McMENAMIN

To commemorate the first anniversary of the lamented death of Father McMenamín a solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated at the Church of the Sacred Heart, Petone, on Thursday, June 13, at 9.30 a.m.

Father Kimbell, Newtown, was the celebrant of the Mass, Father Campbell deacon, Father Phelan subdeacon, and Father O'Connor master of ceremonies. His Grace Archbishop O'Shea presided. There were also present in the sanctuary: Right Rev. Mgr. McKenna, Very Rev. Deans Holley, Power, and Lane, Fathers H. J. McDouneil (St. Patrick's College), Thomas McKenna (Pahiataua), J. Maillard (Otaki), T. Guinane (Upper Hutt), M. Cashman (Masterton), L. F. Dignan (Thorndon), J. Vibeaud (Otaki), D. Cronin (Carterton), M. Devoy (Newtown), and M. Fitzgibbon (Lower Hutt).

From the text: "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place?" (Ps. xxii., 3) Dean Power (Hawera) delivered the following discourse:—"Whoever," writes Pope Pius X., "is graced with the priestly office is vested with it, not for himself alone, but for others also." And St. Paul writes: "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins; who can have compassion upon them that are ignorant and that err, because he himself is also compassed with infirmity. And therefore he ought, as for the people so also for himself, to offer for sins." Not only then is the priest God's ambassador to man, but also man's representative before the throne of God. Essentially a mediator of intercession, the chief duty of his vocation and mission is to represent before God the religious interests of humanity, and with this end to offer to the Almighty the only divine sacrifice that is available. "Receive the power to offer sacrifice and to celebrate Masses as well for the living as for the dead in the name of the Lord" are the words by which priests are ordained. Somebody calls the priest "*Vicarius caritatis Christi*," "Vicar of the charity of Christ": but since the charity of Christ was manifested in the oblation of Himself for the sins of men, the vicar of that charity must fulfil his office by renewing that same oblation, by offering in his turn for poor sinners "the blood which speaketh better than that of Abel." Holding the Host and the Chalice in his hands he controls the treasury of that sin-washing blood, and pouring out its riches on humanity he performs the first great work of his priesthood.

The priest is, again, the heir of the mission of Christ: "As My Father hath sent Me, so do I also send you." He was sent to sanctify His flock: for that flock, He says, He sanctified Himself, and at a supreme moment in His earthly life He prayed to His Father to sanctify it more and more. Therefore the best care of the priest must be to sanctify the people: to give a new flame to the divine fire in the hearts of the pious that they may ever aspire to higher ways; to revive the faith that slumbers in the hearts of the lukewarm, lest God should begin to vomit them out of His mouth: and to melt the ice in the hearts of the impious and snatch them from the everlasting pit. And since Christ did this work of sanctification by His sublime teaching and His ministry of reconciliation, the heir of His mission must be a teacher of wisdom and a physician of souls. His preaching must sanctify—"Sanctify them in truth,"—and his absolving must extract the deadly poison from the gaping wounds of sin.

And now, lest this duty, failing to press urgently, should gradually escape the memory of the priest, the Canon Law intervenes, defines a parish, creates a flock for him who rules it, and thus adds the office of pastor to that of priest, setting up thereby a new relation that shall have eternal consequences. By force of this the priest's mission and labors are concentrated, and must be governed henceforth by the

rule of charity. He must now be devoted first and above all to his own parish, and towards his parishioners he must exercise the greatest care, at the risk of being proved worse than the infidel, and at the peril of being disowned by Him Who is the Shepherd and Pastor of souls.

Behold then in brief the powers of the priest which no man else enjoys: He consecrates the Sacrament of the altar; he preaches with the authority of Christ; he absolves from sins; he rules the flock—in a word, he shares the threefold office of his Divine Master: he is Priest, Prophet, King: he is another Christ.

When I bear all this in mind I do not wonder any more at the extraordinary words of St. Francis of Assisi: "Respect and honor the priests of God, for they are raised to a dignity above all men. They are the spiritual fathers of the Christian people, the spirit and life of the world. As for me, if I were to meet on the road a priest and an angel I would at once go forward to the priest to kiss his hand, and I would say to the angel, Wait, O angel, for the hands of the priest touch the Word of God." I am filled with wonder and with awe when I contemplate Elijah on Mount Carmel confronting the haughty Ahab and the wicked priests of Baal and when I behold the miracle that seals the testimony of the true prophet of God. The false prophets have called in vain upon Baal to send down fire upon their altar: and then Elijah ascends his altar erected to the true God, the victim is placed upon it, the people stand around in silence and speechless with awe while the prophet alone prays; and forthwith fire from heaven descends upon the victim in token that the sacrifice was acceptable to the Almighty. But when the Catholic priest stands alone upon his altar it is not fire or other symbol that he brings down, but the very God Himself. If the dignity of Elijah was great, how much greater is not that of the priest?

What awful dignity! What marvellous power! What tremendous responsibility! Ah, who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place? Who shall stand upon the holy altar and renew the sacrifice that must ascend for evermore from the rising to the setting sun? Who shall mount the pulpit and make known to the people the message caught from the mouth of God? Who shall sit upon the perilous judgment seat of Christ, treat with sinners, and decide terms of pardon with him whose sins were only against his God? "The hands that consecrate ought to be purer than the solar light," the lips that preach ought to be refined with the burning coal of the Seraphim, and the judge dispensing mercy ought to be in the discharge of his office conformed to the image of his Divine Master.

Ah, what poor boy would aspire to those dizzy heights whose responsibilities are so tremendous, and the fall from which must be ruin indeed? But the call of God and the promptings of Divine grace are in a sense imperious, and the Church has always found youths gallant enough to risk their lives for God that they may find them in eternity.

Such a one was he for whose dear soul we are gathered here to-day. To him may be applied the words of Isaias in which he portrays the fellow-workers of Christ. God hath called him from the womb, and hidden him in his quiver from the worldliness of the age, to be a servant who would raise up the fallen and convert the dregs: to be a burning and a shining light to these farthest islands of the sea. Graven in the hands of God, he knew how to protect his people from spiritual hunger and thirst and from the sunstroke of paralysing passion. He knew how to fill the desert and the desolate places and the land of destruction with fervent worshippers to sing in gladness their hymn of praise to God. In a word, he made his work fruitful in your midst, because it is in the holy and strong spirit of God that work was done.

But his life had another lesson and another gift which should be treasured for many a day in the