

Sunday Afternoon Readings

(By RIGHT REV. MGR. POWER for the *N.Z. Tablet*.)

XIV.—THE HIDDEN LIFE OF JESUS.

The Christian life does not consist in the mere acceptance of certain doctrines, but in the following of the life of Christ. It is difficult for the average man to master abstract and learned descriptions of virtue, but when a holy person is set before him, he sees at a glance what holiness means, and how he himself may become holy. This is why the All-Holy God took human flesh: that by placing Himself at our head, He might more easily lead us to follow Him. St. Paul urges us to follow in the steps of Christ, and St. Augustine says that to follow is to imitate. We should, then, make the life of Christ our daily study, and draw from it inspiration and strength to follow in His steps. In our last meditation* we saw Him in the manger: in this let us consider Him, and imitate Him, in the Holy House of Nazareth! From the home-life of the people, the power of Church and State and individual is drawn.

Few worldly-minded people would set much value on a life hidden with Christ in God; the general cry is for activity, publicity, notoriety. Now there is no home-life, even women cannot endure retirement; they scoff at the poet who sings that "Home-keeping hearts are happiest." Home-life is too dull, too tame, too narrow; outside are adventure, excitement, variety, romance. What terrible aberration is here from all that is worthy, noble, and real! How could home-life be anything else than romantic for a mother with a half-dozen children around her, each with his hundred questions. There must be romance in every hour of such a life, a romance that will linger on when the children have gone to bed, or to their last sleep, as children sometimes go while their mothers still remain. All this some women give up for notoriety and excitement.

The plea of the "social worker" is even less enlightened. Woman does her best work for society by the hearth, where her elevating conversation penetrates the hearts of husband and children, and through these percolates and sweetens social life. Now she has the vote, and she ambitions to be a unit in a political mob, rushing from door to door in the interests of her candidate, who is not infrequently a man of loose living. What is this but to insult every high tradition, round which she should have entwined her heart with bands of steel? Who will give us back the knightly days of old, when the grand Catholic men of Europe brought their women into their palace or their humble hut, set their feet upon a mystic pedestal, with a mystic crown upon their heads, and, basking in their smile, saw them shed around them the odors of sweetness, of purity, and of love? But woman herself proclaims that she is but

common clay, that there is no pedestal, no crown. Perhaps she falls into a still lower state, to which her neglect of home has exposed her. That this often happens, is proved by the filth that is washed out monthly from the Augean stables of our New Zealand divorce courts. Look out, ye women who have no love for home:

"O'er all that flutter their wings and fly
A hawk is hovering in the sky."

Who, I asked, will give us back the golden days; and I answer: God will give them back; the God of the Holy House of Nazareth, the God Who loved the hidden life. He will teach us the beauty of home, and unfold to us its priceless treasures. Let us make a daily spiritual visit to the Home at Nazareth. Come first to the Carpenter's shop. It is but a few steps down the garden walk. Joseph will meet us there, and welcome us if we are poor and toilers like himself. We shall see the sweat upon his noble brow and the hard horns of toil upon his hands, but he will speak to us of the true gospel of labor, and tell us of its dignity. Here is a man who does not waste his time, seeking for news of the world along the village street; here is one who does not pass the hours of night in the drinking places, be they inns or clubs; here is a man of mortified, but happy life, a model for every head of a home.

After a little while he will lead us back the garden walk, and introduce us to his Queen, the Lady of the house. Then for the first time we shall understand the beauty of the phrase—The Angel of the Home,—for Mary is indeed the Angel of the Home of Nazareth. Her aroma of terrestrial and celestial loveliness will ravish our hearts. She will speak to us in beautiful words of her home, her work, her Child. Our hearts will burn within us while we listen to this true Woman, doing the work for which God and nature fitted her, and showing herself as the great pattern of all mothers, of all women.

Jesus enters: O, that wonderful Boy! He has been out, delivering some article of furniture which He and Joseph had made, and now brings back the price, small no doubt, but sufficient for their simple needs. While Mother is preparing the evening meal, and Joseph is washing the stains of work from his honest hands, the Boy holds familiar converse with us; He speaks direct to the heart, telling us secrets that no one else can tell, showing us what quiet retirement and enduring mortifications mean, their beauty and uplifting grace. We return from that spiritual visit, new beings, fired with a new motive, and strengthened to face bravely, and surmount triumphantly the trials and the difficulties of life.

The Holy House calls every one of us, priests and people alike; and it is better than the call of worldliness. External ac-

tivity is, of course, necessary if the Church is to live; her priests and her people must be up and doing, that she may carry on her mission. But equally necessary are the virtues of the hidden life, the quiet, unobserved virtues of the home. The priest has to exercise the public ministry of preaching and teaching, but he will give more time—an hour a day—to the quiet recital of the Divine Office, which is called the *Opus Dei*, or Work of God. He will say Mass, but whether he does this in public or in private, he will give at least as much time before and after to silent prayer with God.

There are Orders of men and Orders of women who take no part in the external activities of the Church, but devote all their days to contemplation: they are called the Contemplative Orders. That is to say, a portion of the Mystic Body of Christ devotes itself to this distinctive and necessary duty. So also each individual member of the Church must devote a part of his time to meditation and recollection, to spiritual reading and quiet daily prayer. The same must be said of those visits to the public church which are of obligation: after the example of the Holy Family and in union with the Holy Family, we must take part in the public worship of God.

The hidden life is not a wasted power: it is a power of conservation, without which every effort is dissipated. It is the life that Jesus lived for thirty out of His thirty-three years on earth, and no one did such work for the world and human souls as He. It is "the better part" and "the one thing needful." It is the characteristic of Christ, which must be reproduced in every member of His Mystic Body, in every Catholic.

What a much happier place the world would be if the children in our homes were more like the Child Jesus, if they were obedient, kind, and gentle, if they were kept under gentle but safe restraint, and were taught that their own sweet will was no safe rule of living. The public press is forced to bewail the loss of home-life, and points to the consequent decay of the virtues that flow from it, and to the alarming decadence of social purity. But the press must boldly hold up the example of Jesus of Nazareth, if it would aid in the regeneration of society; this it will not do so long as it is the manacled slave of the apostles of godlessness. Let Catholics at least refuse to sell their birthright for the excitements and notoriety of the world; let them love the safe and hidden life of home, and take up with joy its trials and mortifications. Let them love the very heartstone. Round it are gathered all the fondest traditions of life; it is the centre and guardian of civilisation, it is the nursery of the Church. Home, Sweet Home! When God's blessing is poured out upon it, it becomes the fragrance of life, and the surest guarantee of that Home beyond the grave which we all hope for when the labors of life are over.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, Who, becoming subject to Mary and Joseph, didst hallow home life by singular virtues; by their help grant that we may be taught by the example of Thy holy family and have fellowship with it for evermore."

* Being appropriate to the occasion, this particular article appeared in the *Tablet* for December 24.

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