

The pulpit is an instrument in this process of stimulating the immanent, mental activity of the faithful; it informs, reminds, encourages, uplifts, warns. Above all, the sermon or instruction in a public church is a divinely privileged occasion requiring episcopal sanction.

But to be completely effective, particularly in our own day as a means of presenting the Faith, the pulpit must be supplemented by group activities, through which individual attention and a vital integration into the fulness of the Christian life are made possible.



PAROCHIAL SERMONS

BEDE BAILEY, O.P.

RECENTLY I was given the new H.M.V. issue of Chaliapin singing excerpts from the opera *Boris Godunov*. A copy of the Russian text, with a line-by-line literal translation, is provided with the record. Chaliapin's wonderful voice and artistic sense make a whole of the music and of the words, so that even if one were quite unable to follow their meaning, some of the highly-taut emotions would be received by the listener.

I put the record on for a friend one afternoon and gave him the text. At a first hearing it is not easy to follow. For twenty minutes we listened to a great dramatic performance. When it was finished, I asked what he thought of it. 'He had a wonderful voice; and he was putting his whole heart into it, but I couldn't follow why he sang just as he did. Listening to him was rather like being at Mass, with the priest going through a whole rigmarole of different actions, and using different voices, and taking up different positions, and I don't know what he's doing it all for. He's putting his whole heart and soul into it, but most of us don't know why he acts as he does. It's our fault, of course, for not taking the trouble to find out.' I do not think the last remark

was made to quieten clerical susceptibilities. And of course it is only partly true. One thinks of the thousands of people going to Mass on Sunday mornings, and evenings now too. They go for all sorts of reasons: some out of duty; others because they have the habit of going; or because they are expected to go by wife, husbands, parents, or children; or just because of what the neighbours might say if their absence was noticed; and some go for our Lord's sake, because they want to be there when for our sakes he re-presents on the altar his passion and death.

The same state of affairs is present throughout much of the Catholic code of behaviour and belief; and for many it is little more than just a code. Otherwise it could not so easily be shed. Think of the number of Catholics, for example, who have had an average amount of instruction, and yet get married in register offices in order to avoid what they are afraid may be a troublesome and embarrassing interview with the priest. How many Catholics are there who think, in their heart of hearts, that many of the 'rules' of the Church are out of date, crusty, almost impossible of achievement in our world? Sometimes they even think them wrong. They do not realize how false it is to think of these things just as 'rules', made by professional law-makers. It is a pity, to say the least, that there seems to be so little understanding of the vast difference between the laws of God and those of man, even when those of man are part of the laws of the Church; between the prohibition not to eat flesh meat on Fridays, for example, and the command that we should love our neighbours as ourselves.

In the first volume of his *Reformation in England*, Mgr Philip Hughes gives an analysis of the kind of instruction the Catholics of England were receiving from the clergy before the storm broke. He asks 'the great question that recurs at more than one crisis of this story, namely, how far the Catholic of those times was adequately instructed in the nature of what he was doing. . . . Never, at any time, more than in these centuries [of the Middle Ages] did Catholics stand in greater need of constant reminder that among the acts of that virtue whose object is the worship of God—the virtue specifically called Religion—it is the internal acts that are all-important, the intellect's activities of prayer, and the will's activity of devotion. The virtue specifically called Religion presupposes indeed, for the reality and fruitfulness of its

various acts, a will wholly devoted to God: and this devotedness in the will derives (as to its natural sources) from deep and rooted conviction in the intelligence, from truths alive, truths that are not assented to merely as speculations, but are realities that penetrate the whole mental make-up, intelligence, passions, likes and dislikes—truths that have come to do all this as a result of incessant preoccupation with them on the part of man, as the effect of meditation. And the chief truths, meditation on which produces this effect, and so the needed devoted will, are the truths of man's utter helplessness without God, and of God's infinite will to save in love. Here is the natural source of the religion that alone matters, the religion personal to the human being, the thing secret between himself and God, the all-important conquest of the Kingdom of God over the heart of man. Here are those truths, in other words, which, if a man does not everlastingly recall and dwell upon, he will never break the surface of religious practice. And at all times, to effect this conviction in the minds of others, to assist the transformation from speculation to realization, has been the chief office of the preacher of the Gospel. He must offer more than logical argument, as he sets forth the Christian mysteries, for God came to save through these mysteries, not logicians, but men.' (pp. 93-94.)

What was true in 1500 is equally true now, and the lack of this proper instruction could have the same terrible consequences. "On its purely doctrinal side, then, the English pulpit of the waning Middle Ages has little inspiration to offer", writes Philip Hughes, quoting Dr G. R. Owst (*Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*). "If Dr Owst's reconstruction is exact, we need go little further in our search for the secret of the coming general apostasy, and of the extraordinary phenomenon that so often, in the course of a single lifetime, the English were ready to endure radical changes and counter changes in religious life." (p. 98.)

It is in church alone that most of us have the chance of learning from early childhood until our death. What do we need to be told? Surely, almost all the time, about the solid and awe-inspiring foundations of our religion. We all need to learn that God became man and died for us. We have all heard it, but until we have possessed the truth and it has grown into our lives as a part of ourselves, we still need to learn; and even if we are good learners, we can never exhaust the knowledge of his love for us.

What sort of a person do people think God-made-man is? During his lifetime here what did he look like? Do people think he looked like the statue of the Sacred Heart in their parish church? How did he behave in certain circumstances? How was it that during a few months of his life he managed to create such a reputation for himself that he became the best-known person in his country? People crowded to hear him, or just to see him. He became a menace to those established in high places, but the hope and pride of simple people. He was received into the houses of those who suspected and feared him and, such was the force of his personality, those houses became open to the waifs and strays of society while he was in them, just because he was there. He was himself homeless and dependent on the gifts of others for the necessities of life; yet he could make the grandest of claims for himself, and was not laughed at by his enemies, but feared. He was gentle, lovable, and yet tough, in mind and body.

Is it untrue to say that our Lord is the only reason for Christianity? Without him there would be no such religion. Without him there is no Christianity. To learn about him is the absolute necessity.

If he really is the son of God made man, who died for us; and if it is the fact that he could have won his purpose and redeemed us in innumerable other ways; but that he accepted the way of his suffering and crucifixion to try and prove to us once and for all how much we are worth to him and how deep is his love for us—at the heart of all love, said Mgr Knox, is an element of desperation; and if he knows all about us because he is our creator as well as our saviour; then how can it be that he ever asks us to do anything, or believe anything, that is not the best for us? He does not make rules for their own sakes. He does not command because he likes to. He is not particularly interested in regulations as such. But he is wholly interested in us, and in the best for us. Everything that he wants from us, and everything that he does for us, is because of his relentless concern for us.

Many people slip away from the Church because they have never grasped the need for religion. And sometimes it is even worse than that. They do not even understand the natural law, and why it should be kept. They understand what is little better than the law of the jungle. Man, as a thinking person, who can judge the causes of things, and the results of what he does, either

for good or ill, is someone remote from their lives. That is concerned with behaviour, with morals. But belief comes before morals, since our behaviour, or at any rate our consciences, will depend on what we believe.

Nowadays, it seems that almost anything can be explained and given its scientific causes, and the pressure to discard God the creator is constant. Once we do that, there is no need for God the redeemer, because there is no such thing as sin, or goodness, in the Christian meaning of the words. Our Lord then becomes no more than he was to the superior Jews, a nuisance and a trouble-maker. Christianity is judged to be a cause of many of the world's problems.

We need to go back to the root of things and, in spite of the smiles it may cause, to learn again from the inspired word of God; to hear again the voice of God declaring, 'I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the house of bondage'; and to learn from the New Testament the way in which we were rescued, and who our rescuer is, and how he has taken us into his own house.



FROM THE PEW

MICHAEL DE LA BEDOYERE

THE picture is of a medium-sized church, well filled with mothers and fathers and children of all ages—a baby probably intent on also being heard, and dozens of very small children, restless, crawling about, biting father's ear and being shushed by mother. Besides the family groups there are young men and young girls, more or less aware of one another and the show they are putting up. As with the family groups, the old and the young may or may not have missals, a prayer-book, their rosary-beads. While one would hope that those who have come to Mass, armed with nothing more than their offering, are contemplatives who have passed beyond the stage of actually saying prayers and wondering whether mental prayer or the prayer of quiet is best suiting their spiritual progress, it is not, I think, uncharitable to assume that a high percentage are in church simply because Sunday Mass is an obligation under pain of mortal