

Homily by Father Corcoran

## Historic Homily

*This "historic homily" was presented on the Fourth Sunday of Advent by Fr. Charles Corcoran, the pastor of St. Michael's from 1891 to 1943. It has been edited to include paragraph breaks, making it easier to read. There is no record of the date this homily was originally given.*

It is over 1800 years since the words I have just quoted were pronounced in Judea by the precursor of our Divine Savior. St. John the Baptist was destined and sought out by God as the forerunner of His Incarnate Son to spread the joyful tidings that the long-looked-for Messiah was about to come and to prepare the chosen people to receive him worthily. This cry of St. John is repeated by the Church to-day and brought before the minds of all the faithful.

We are all bidden to prepare the way of the Lord for although it is more than eighteen centuries since Christ really came into this world he must come to our souls as the Saviour, He must be born again, must live in our hearts. If such is the case, his glorious birth, humble life and painful death will be of no avail to us. We shall have no part in the graces and blessings he obtained for mankind unless he really lives in our hearts. And this is no mere figure of speech. No! It is the truth for He himself says "If anyone love me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and will make our abode with him." So that if we wish to have any share in the redemption offered by Christ to all then He must come and dwell in our hearts filling them with His grace. He will renew our hearts, and pour into them the balm of this holy love. He will take possession of our hearts, will rule and guide them according to his holy will. Our hearts will become more like his divine heart. The fulfillment of his Will will become our one thought, and like St. Paul we will have a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.

During the entire year the Church warns us that it is our duty to receive Jesus into our hearts and there prepare for Him a dwelling place but now the invitation is doubly pressing, during this season of Advent, now that the feast of His Birth is so near. During these days He is knocking at the door of our hearts asking for admittance as He once knocked at the doors of Bethlehem. Do not, like the inhabitants of Bethlehem, refuse him admittance. Receive Him into your hearts, prepare for Him there a dwelling place and thus show to Him your love and gratitude.

And who has a greater claim on our love and gratitude? He is the omnipotent God before whom the highest Angels bend in deep adoration. Heaven is but the hem of his Garment and earth his foot-soul. All that is beautiful and inspiring on earth is of His creation and is but a faint reflection of His unending majesty and beauty. This mighty, powerful God loved us so much that for our sake, he lead a life of sorrow and suffering, and crowned all by dying a most painful death for our redemption. All that we have, and are, our existence even, we owe to Him for unless his hand sustained us we would fall back into original nothingness.

And now he comes to us, knocking at our hearts and requests admittance. Shall we, like the inhabitants of Bethlehem, refuse? The inhabitants of Bethlehem have at least an excuse. They did not know Him but many Christians know Him well, know well who he is and what He has done for them and nevertheless refuse him admittance. In those hearts there is place for everything. Place for parents and relations, place for friends and acquaintances, place for pleasures and riches but no place for their Redeemer. He, the Creator, is driven away by his own creature. They think and plan night and day how to make money, how to prosper in their business but never give a thought to the great object of their creation, never try to do that, without which all else would be in vain, to save their soul. Sad to say many Christians think more of their few dollars than they do of their Creator and Redeemer. They close their hearts to Him because his presence would force them to forego sin, to avoid sinful occasions and model their lives after that of our Divine Savior. For a sinful pleasure which lasts but a moment and then brings remorse in its trail they spurn God with all His graces and benefits; for the transient and unstable riches and benefits of this world they exchange the real and eternal joys of heaven.

It is for our own advantage that God commands our obedience to His laws. He is willing to free us from sin, to impart to our souls the supernatural life of grace and to give us aid and assistance in leading a good life if we only wish it sincerely (and ask it humbly.) Suppose a criminal in prison awaiting his condemnation, expecting every moment to be sentenced to death - what would he not give if his guilt could be blotted out, if he could again regain his liberty. With what transports of joy would he receive his deliverer, with what love and gratitude would he follow him. He would face all dangers and perils in the service of one who had so befriended him.

Now every Christian in the state of mortal sin is such a criminal or rather a far greater one. He has squandered and misused the riches God gave him. He has abused his faculties of soul and body; they were given him that he might the better serve God he has used them to satisfy his sinful passions to gratify his evil desires. He has offended the majesty of God in a hundred ways, and is now awaiting condemnation for any moment God may call him to render an account of his stewardship. At any moment the sentence of death may be passed on him and he will fall helpless into the never ending flames of hell. But see: there is still hope. He has but to take Jesus into his heart and all will be forgiven. His divine Guest will set him free from the chains of sin and load him with graces.

In the sacrament of penance our souls are cleansed and purified, sin is completely blotted out: The yawning abyss of Hell is closed, and the gates of heaven once more opened to us. Jesus inhabits our soul by his grace - a gift far more precious than all else in the world. And He will bring peace and contentment into our hearts and minds. Peace with ourselves and peace with God.

At the time of his birth in Bethlehem the world enjoyed profound peace. The cry of the Angels was "peace on earth to all men of good will." And now too he brings peace to the restless heart, balm to the wounded spirit. Even sorrow and suffering become sweet and easy when borne in resignation to the will of God and out of love for Him. God sends us

many sorrows and trials in order to detach us from the world, and to draw us nearer to him; others are sent with a view to increase our virtue and merits. But all are rendered endurable by love of God. Just as the sun gilds with its soft rays the darkest clouds so the presence of Jesus in our hearts renders all things agreeable.

With Him in our hearts we can calmly await the hour of death for what is it but a passing from this cold world into the presence of a dearly beloved master. We will not fear Him whom we have received as a guest into our hearts. We prepared for Him, a dwelling place, and he will prepare for us one of happiness and joy that will last forever. What preparations must we make to receive worthily our divine visitor? When we expect to be visited by some great personage we prepare and arrange in the best manner possible the apartments he is to occupy. And if Jesus is to come to our hearts and there reside we must prepare him a dwelling place worthy of His infinite majesty. But how are we to prepare our hearts to receive worthily this august guest; are our hearts stained perhaps with sin, filled with evil inclinations, entirely occupied with the cares and pleasures of this world to become the worthy receptacle of the God of heaven and earth?

On account of our sin the Angels fell, for one sin Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise. One mortal sin is sufficient to condemn the sinner to an eternity of pain and yet how slight in our eyes is the malice of sin. In heaven countless myriads of saints and angels, inflamed with the most arduous(?) love, praise and adore God continually while we give him but an occasional, cold thought. How then can we prepare worthily to receive him into our hearts? Of ourselves, my dear Brethren we can do nothing but we can do all things with the grace of God. His grace will remove the stains of sin from our souls, will give us strength to resist temptations, and will enable us to perform works meritorious in the sight of God.

But you must do what lies in your power towards accomplishing this end. It is not enough to be sorry for past sin; you must resolve to avoid it in the future and take the necessary steps to shun it successfully. You must avoid the occasions of sin, bad reading, bad companions whatever in time may tend to lead you to commit sin. You can have no true sorrow for sin if you refuse to take these precautions. He who professes to hate sin and still loves its causes is but a (???? ?????). To such a one the coming festival will bring no peace or joy. Jesus will not take up his abode in such a heart nor does such a person really deserve to receive God with all his attendant graces and blessings. It would be too much trouble for him to prepare his heart to receive this divine guest. How foolish men are to prefer a broken and distorted ray of light to the brilliant sun of truth and justice.

But it is not enough to purify and cleanse our hearts from sin and evil inclinations. If we wish to make it a fit abode for the Divine visitor we must adorn it with virtues. The grace of God which makes us holy and pleasing in the sight of God is a necessary ornament for without this grace our sins are not remitted. As light and darkness are incompatible so too the grace of God and mortal sin can never remain together in the same person. But this grace of God is or should be the ordinary ornament of our souls but at this time when our Divine Savior is coming to us in a special manner we should adorn our hearts with more

than ordinary magnificence. We should excite in them, fill them with love of God and of our neighbor.

Assuredly it is not difficult for anyone, who considers all that God has done for us to love God. The man who reflects cannot help loving him. Thoughtlessness and especially sin are the causes of coldness towards the divine Creator and Redeemer. If men would avoid sin and consider often who God is and what he has done for them they would be inflamed with love for his divine Perfection. If they would pray with fervor and devotion and receive the sacraments often they would soon become Christians not only in name but in fact, followers of Christ, whose first thought would be for the salvation of their own soul, and their next for the spread and increase of God's kingdom here on earth.

Of this love of God arises love for our neighbour. Jesus at his birth brought peace to all men of good will. Let us perpetuate that peace; Let all enmity and hatred be banished from our minds and hearts, the joyous anniversary of his birth. Let us make our peace with God and with all men. The feast of Christmas commemorates the greatest honor ever conferred on humanity for on that day God himself became man. This thought alone should make us love our fellow men.

But this love should not remain a mere sentiment in our hearts. We should remember to make all men happy as far as it lies in our power. Those who have received from God an abundance this world's gifts should give some part to their needy brethren. And remember that everything you do for the poor, you do to God himself. Does he not say "Amen" and say to you "as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to me." Would you not have been happy if you had the privilege of giving shelter to the infant Jesus when he knocked in vain at the doors of Bethlehem? How gladly you would have admitted the holy family, what honors you would show in their service.

But you have the same opportunity now. You have God's word that whatever you do for your fellow creatures will be considered as a service to God himself. Try then to give some poor person food in remembrance of the holy family at Bethlehem. Try to clothe some poor child as you would have given clothes to the infant Jesus had you seen and known him then. By so doing, you will prepare to receive worthily the Lord's visit at Christmas. He will repay you a hundred times over by the graces and blessings he will give you here and will reward you hereafter with an eternity of happiness.

Amen.