

ments are to be administered, it enjoins upon them the duty of explaining their efficacy in the vulgar tongue to those who are about to receive them.

These prescriptions of the Sacred Council of Trent have been epitomised and still more clearly defined by Our Predecessor Benedict XIV. in his Constitution, 'Etsi Minime' in the following words: 'Two chief obligations have been imposed by the Council of Trent on those who have the care of souls: first, that they address the people on divine things on feast days; and second, that they instruct the young and the ignorant in the rudiments of the law of God and of faith.' Rightly does that most wise Pontiff make a distinction between those two duties of the sermon, commonly known as the explanation of the Gospel and of the catechism. For it may be that there are some who, to save themselves trouble, are willing to believe that the explanation of the Gospel may serve also for catechetical instruction. This is an error which should be apparent to all. For the sermon on the Gospel is addressed to those who may be supposed to be already instructed in the rudiments of the faith. It is, so to say, the bread that is broken for adults. Catechetical instruction, on the other hand, is that milk which the Apostle St. Peter wished to be desired with simplicity by the faithful as newly-born children.

The Task of the Catechist

is to take up one or other of the truths of faith or Christian precept, and to explain it in all its parts; and since the scope of this instruction is always directed to amendment of life, he must necessarily institute a comparison between what is required of us by Our Lord and our actual conduct; and he should, therefore, by appropriate examples skilfully selected from the Holy Scriptures, Church history, and the lives of the saints, use persuasion with his hearers and point out to them how they are to shape their conduct, concluding with an efficacious exhortation in order that they may be moved to shun and detest vice and to practise virtue.

We are aware that the office of catechist is not much sought after, because, as a rule, it is deemed of little account and does not lend itself easily to the winning of applause. But this, in Our view, is an estimate born of vanity and not of truth. We are quite willing to admit the merits of those sacred orators who dedicate themselves with genuine zeal to the glory of God by the defence and maintenance of the faith, or by extolling the heroes of Christianity. But their labour presupposes labour of another kind, that of the catechist. Where the latter is wanting, the foundations are wanting, and they labor in vain who build the house. Too often it happens that ornate sermons, which win the applause of crowded congregations serve only to tickle the ears, and fail utterly to touch the heart. Catechetical instruction, on the other hand, plain and simple though it be, is that word of which God Himself speaks in Isaiah: 'And as the rain and the snow came down from Heaven and return no more thither, but soak the earth and water it, and make it to spring, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be which shall go forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do whatsoever I please, and shall prosper in the things for which I sent it.' The same, we think, is to be said of those priests who compose laborious books to illustrate the truths of religion. They are worthy of great commendation for their activity. But how many read these volumes and derive fruit in proportion to the toil and the wishes of those who wrote them? Whereas the teaching of the Catechism, when properly done, never fails to be of profit to those who listen to it.

For (we must repeat this truth in order to stimulate the zeal of the ministers of the sanctuary) there are to-day vast numbers, and they are constantly increasing, who are utterly ignorant of the truths of religion, or who have at most so little knowledge of God and of the Christian faith that they can live as idolaters in the very midst of the light of Christianity. How many there are, not only among the young, but among adults and even those tottering with age who know nothing of the principal mysteries of faith, who on hearing the name of Christ can only ask 'Who is he . . . that I may believe in Him' (John iv. 36). And in consequence of this ignorance they make no crime of exciting and cherishing hatred against their neighbour, of entering into most unjust contracts, giving themselves up to dishonest speculations, possessing themselves of the property of others by enormous usury, and committing similar iniquities. They are actually ignorant that

The Law of Christ

not only forbids immoral actions, but condemns deliberate immoral thoughts, and immoral desires, so that even when they are restrained by some motive or other from abandoning themselves to sensual pleasures, they feed without any kind of scruple on evil thoughts, multiplying sins beyond the hairs of their heads. Nor, let it be repeated, are such to be found only among the poorer classes of the people or in country places, but in the highest walks of life, and among those who, inflated with knowledge, rely upon a vain erudition and think themselves at liberty to turn religion into ridicule and to 'blaspheme that which they know not' (Jud. 10).

Now if it is vain to expect a harvest where no seed has been sown, how can we hope to have better-living generations if they be not instructed in time in the doctrine of Jesus Christ? It follows, too, that if faith languishes in our days, if it has almost vanished throughout a large proportion of the people, the reason is that the duty of catechetical teaching is either fulfilled very superficially or altogether neglected. Nor will it do to say, in excuse, that faith is a free gift bestowed on each one at baptism. Yes, all who are baptised in Christ have had infused into them the habit of faith; but this most divine germ does not develop, or put forth great branches (Mark iv. 32) when left to itself, and as if by its own virtue. Man at his birth has within him the faculty of understanding, but he has need also of the mother's word to awaken it as it were, and to bring it into action. So too the Christian, born again of the water and the Holy Ghost, has faith within him but he requires the word of the Church to fecundate it and develop it, and make it fruitful. Hence the Apostle wrote: 'Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God' (Romans x. 17), and to show the necessity of teaching he adds: 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' (Ibid.).

Now if all that has been said serves to show the supreme importance of religious teaching, supreme also must be Our solicitude in maintaining always in vigor, and in re-establishing where it may happen to have become neglected, the teaching of the catechism which Benedict XIV. described as 'the most useful of institutions for the glory of God and the salvation of souls' (Cons. 'Etsi Minime,' 13). Desirous, therefore, Venerable Brethren, of fulfilling this most important duty, imposed upon Us by the Supreme Apostolate, and of introducing uniformity everywhere in this most weighty matter, We do by Our Supreme authority, enact and strictly ordain that in all dioceses

The Following Precepts be Observed:

I.—All parish priests, and, in general, all those who have the care of souls, on every Sunday and feast day throughout the year, without exception, shall with the text of the catechism instruct for the space of an hour the young of both sexes in what everyone must believe and do to be saved.

II.—They shall, at stated times during the year, prepare boys and girls by continued instruction, lasting several days, to receive the sacraments of Penance and Confirmation.

III.—They shall likewise, and with special care, on all ferial days of Lent, and if necessary on other days after the feast of Easter, by suitable instruction and reflections, prepare boys and girls to make their first Communion in a holy manner.

IV.—In each and every parish the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine is to be canonically erected. Through this the parish priests, especially in places where there is a scarcity of priests, will find valuable helpers for the Catechetical instruction in pious lay persons who will lend their aid to this holy and salutary work, both through zeal for the glory of God and as a means of gaining the numerous indulgences granted by the Sovereign Pontiff.

V.—In large towns, and especially in those which contain universities, colleges, and grammar schools, let religious classes be founded, to instruct in the truths of faith and in the practice of Christian life the young people who frequent those public schools from which all religious teaching is banned.

VI.—Considering too, that especially in these days adults not less than the young stand in need of religious instruction, all parish priests and others having the care of souls, shall, in addition to the usual homily on the Gospel delivered at the parochial Mass on all days of obligation, explain the Catechism for the faithful in any easy style, suited to the intelligence of their hearers, at such time of the day as they