

VOCATIONS TO CATHOLIC SISTERHOODS

IDEALISM OF THE SUPERNATURAL

ELOQUENT TRIBUTE BY ARCHBISHOP IRELAND

On Wednesday of last week (says the Louisville Record of April 3), the new Novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph was formally opened by Archbishop Ireland in his episcopal city, St. Paul, Minn. On this occasion, he pronounced one of the very best discourses in his illustrious life. Because of its length, we are obliged to omit its introductory and personal concluding parts. But, what we print is its solid body. Forming his text were the words of Christ, '*And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My name's sake, shall receive one hundred fold, and shall possess life everlasting.*' 'We are,' he said, 'in the world of idealism. It is idealism the purest, the loftiest—the idealism of the supernatural—the longing of the soul for those high-born realities, its flight, generous and unselfish, towards union with them. The world to-day is losing in idealism, because it is losing in religion. God is put out of sight.' The Archbishop then proceeded to speak of the full significance of the Catholic Sisterhoods.

From the beginning the Catholic Church held in high honor the practice of the evangelical counsels. The Church is to-day, as it was in the past, as it will be to-morrow, the guardian, the advocate of the highest forms of idealism in the region of the supernatural. In every age, over every land, the sanctuaries of its priesthood, the monasteries and convents of its vow-bound sons and daughters give testimony to its fidelity to the high mark of sacrifice and devotion set by its Founder, to its unceasing fecundity in heroes capable of reaching upward to the summits of supernatural idealism. 'Magna mater virum—the potent mother of heroes,' the Catholic Church has ever been, and ever will be. Else, it were not the Church of the Gospel of Christ. No words of Christ fell lifeless to the ground. . . .

Study Our Catholic Sisterhoods—the glory of the Catholic faith, the marvel of divine grace working in human nature, the living mirror of the virtues preached in the Gospel of Christ, the valiant arm of the Church in its plannings for the salvation of souls, and the uplift of human society.

What do our Sisterhoods for fellow-creatures? Our Sisterhoods pray and make expiation. Those of us who have the knowledge of the mysteries of divine grace, know the value before God of prayer for others, of expiation of sin for others. This, the gift of the Sisterhoods to their sisters and brothers, tossed hither and thither on the perilous billows of worldliness, exposed to death in fatal shipwreck unless succor from God's throne be invoked upon them. Our Sisterhoods give edification, by the diffusion through the surrounding atmosphere, of the fragrance of the supernatural. It was Cardinal Manning who said that the mere residence of a Sisterhood in a parish is a constant exhortation to the practices of religion.

What Our Sisterhoods Do For Fellow-Creatures. The land is strewn with their schools, hospitals, orphan-asylums, refuges and protectorates. No ill is there that their hand does not soften, no sorrow that they do not appease, no sore that they would not heal, no uplift of mind and heart to which their help is not promptly rushed. The deeper the evil and the more repulsive the sore, the more prodigal and the more unremitting their zeal. The consecration is until death: the sacrifice is without limit; the disinterestedness absolute and complete. Wherever service is possible, it is given; and given with the fulness of soul which gold and silver do not purchase, which fame and applause do not reward. Our Catholic Sisterhoods! Their work is explained only when Christ's saying is remembered: 'Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me.'

The debt of gratitude the Catholic Church owes to its Sisterhoods finds no measure in words. They are the abiding proof that the Gospel of Christ finds in the Church full and abiding realisation. And in this, too, it is their debtor—they do in its name and to its glory works most necessary to its healthiness of life, to its power to win to itself a hearing from the positivist world around it.

I speak particularly of our own times and of our own country. What were the Church in America without Catholic schools and Catholic charities? Without Catholic schools our little ones were the prey of unbelief and secularism. Without Catholic charities the world of unbelief would ask: To what serves in humanity the Catholic Church? Is it not a voice without interest to us, without touch with the world in which alone we are concerned? Well, as matters are with us in America, our schools and our charities were impossible, if we had not our Catholic Sisterhoods. Our schools were impossible, because without the disinterestedness of our Sisterhoods, laboring day after day, until years have benumbed lip and hand, for the pittance of humble raiment and parsimonious meal, our school-houses were void of teachers and of pupils. Impossible, no less, our charities, because here too disinterestedness is imperative, and because the lustre of those charities is due to that supernal sweetness of service, issuing from divine grace, which enrobes our Sisterhoods in peerless attractiveness, unpurchasable by the richest gifts of earth.

The Idealism of the Supernatural!

Fair and rapturous it is in vision: yet fairer, yet more rapturous, as its living exemplars walk and work on earth. A duty is incumbent upon us. It is, that we pray and labor that our Catholic Sisterhoods be multiplied the hundred-fold.

I plead for vocations to our Catholic Sisterhoods. In so pleading, I plead for an increase in the supernatural life within the Church, for an increase in the outward exhibitions of this life in the works of Christian education and of Christian charity. Speaking more directly of the Northwest, the need of our vocations is urgent. With our rapid growth in population, we must widen our works of charity, we must multiply our Catholic schools if we keep pace with needs and opportunities. To this end we must bend our best energies in giving increase to the membership of our Sisterhoods.

If the increase is not given the fault lies with ourselves. God does His share. The arm of His might is not shortened: the flow of His grace is not slackened. His love for the Church is ever the same: where needs and opportunities occur, He is ready with aid. But co-operation is required. God acts with us, not without us. To the Catholic maiden, in the silence of prayer and meditation there comes

The Vision of Ideal Service:

her heart impels her to higher and better things than the mere observances of the common precept: it is the voice once spoken in Palestine—'Come, and follow Me.' But she makes delay; and the delay is fatal. Meanwhile the world unfolds its allurements: false friends picture false charms: Heaven, impatient of repulse, ceases its call. A vocation is lost, because no heed is given to the divine invitation.

The maiden tells father and mother that she has heard the voice of the Master, that her soul burns with ambition to be altogether the daughter of His love. But, father and mother, poor themselves in generosity, do not brook generosity in their child. Worldly consideration dominate their thoughts. Little to them the welfare of religion; little, even, the deep and lasting happiness the religious life holds in store for the child. To the mirage of the world's ventures they will yield her: not to God and to His Church. A vocation is lost, because of the lack of strong faith in parents.

Frequently—shall I dare say it—where vocations do not germinate and thrive, blame belongs to the priest, who fails to lend a keen eye to the discovery of vocations: who, when the discovery is made, fails to give them increment and direction. So busied are

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