

Bible seems to have had its uses apart from its size (it was never a pocket edition!) . . . every copy I have seen has had a plentiful supply of space for family records. Births, deaths, and marriages are all provided for; and in some cases the pages set aside for these records are copiously decorated with heavy ornamentation.

The Haydock Bible is a curiosity today and its originators nearly forgotten. It was, I suppose, the high water mark in their lives. For both it meant financial ruin; Thomas turned his hand to various undertakings but never achieved further success. George had his priesthood and his priestly duties to return to . . . but even these were taken from him when he was under a personal interdict¹ for just over eight years. The world seems to have dealt hardly with these two, but they have left their names enshrined in a monumental work . . . the Haydock Bible.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Expounding the Sunday Gospel

I am afraid that my title, though a convenient one, is an example of *lucus a non lucendo*, since my main interest is to discuss whether the Sunday Gospel may lawfully be passed over and another expounded. Once upon a time I read a paper to the Conference of Higher Studies upon "Holy Scripture and the Liturgy," which appeared in the *Dublin Review* for July 1936, and I may be allowed to refer to it here for much that cannot find a place in the present note. It must be enough to remark that the present selection of epistles and gospels for Sundays is not the result of careful investigation, nor yet a happy one upon its own merits. The biblical and the liturgical movement alike suggest improvement; until this is effected, the question arises whether a parish priest may take it upon himself to read a more helpful epistle or gospel instead of the prescribed one.

The Very Rev. Canon Mahoney (whose authority, I need not say, I greatly respect and am prepared to follow) has published two relevant answers in the *Clergy Review*. In Vol. XV (July–December 1938), p. 537, the question put ran as follows: "Is there any express law which requires the sermon at the chief Mass on Sunday to be explanatory of the Gospel of the day rather than an exposition of some other portion

¹ Haydock's interdict was connected with a sum of money left to endow a poor school for girls at Whitby. The donor seems to have some 30 years later wanted the money to be given to Ushaw. George Haydock paid back £200 thinking it had been a conditional bequest. He refused to pay the rest when he discovered from his predecessor that it had been an absolute gift. He writes in 1849: "I asked simply, as I have done usque ad nauseam, from the different bishops and presidents (of Ushaw) since . . . 'can an absolute donation be recalled, particularly in such circumstances?'"

of Christian doctrine?" Canon Mahoney pointed out in answer that the "usual homily" imposed upon parish priests by the code of canon law (canon 1344) "is usually taken to be an explanation of the Gospel . . . but it is a very elastic rule, and it is permitted to depart from it on occasion," and he gives it as his conclusion that "it should not be habitually disregarded unless such a practice is countenanced by the Ordinary."

In Vol. XXIV (January–December 1944), p. 87, the question was: "Is there a strict obligation to read in English, on Sundays and holidays, the epistle and gospel of the Mass? May other scriptural extracts be substituted in order to widen the people's knowledge?" To this Canon Mahoney answers: (i) "We cannot discover any certain written precept in the common law ordering the epistle and gospel to be read at the public Masses on Sundays and holy days . . . (ii) Local written law very frequently imposes a strict obligation of reading the epistle and gospel at all Sunday Masses . . . (iii) In dioceses which have no local written law, it will usually be found that there is a legitimate custom *praeter legem*. It is our opinion that the parish priest may not, on his own authority, discontinue the custom of reading the epistle and gospel in English at the Sunday Masses. But he may, of course, in addition to these extracts, read other portions of the Scriptures if he so desires. This is, in fact, recommended for catechetical instruction by I *West*. December viii, n. 3: *copiosis et aptis sacrae Scripturae locis*."

One obvious suggestion may be made, that at the *evening* service it may be useful at times to read a whole extract from Scripture rather than a single text. The Fathers were more accustomed than we are nowadays to comment in a series of homilies upon a whole work of Holy Writ, and something of the same kind might well be attempted nowadays, say upon one of the gospels or epistles, and might contain a great deal of valuable instruction. The less telling points might simply be omitted. A course of this kind would require careful preparation (would this be the chief difficulty?) but might excite considerable interest. At first it might be confined to only a few homilies. Moral no less than dogmatic lessons should be drawn. St. John Chrysostom would supply an admirable model, to be used with discretion.

Again, canon 1345 of the Code says that it is to be desired that on holidays of obligation a short explanation should be given of the gospel or of some part of Christian doctrine in all churches and public oratories. The alternative offered is an important one, because it seems to show that the explanation of Catholic doctrine is put upon a level with the explanation of the gospel. In some dioceses (not, I think, in all) there are admirable schemes of instruction for all the Sunday Masses, except for the homily at the last Mass. In this way the faithful in three years

or so receive a thorough course of instruction in Catholic faith and morals, except for those who frequent the last Mass. But it might well be a gain if those at the last Mass received it also, reinforced by a suitable biblical extract; if the Sunday Gospel did not suit, leave might perhaps be given to use another. If upon each point of Catholic faith and morals the most telling passage of Scripture were always expounded, the instruction might more easily be driven home, and at the same time a considerable store of effective biblical knowledge be imparted.

These two suggestions have seemed worth making, and some others might be thought of; but I am supposing always that nothing be done contrary to the orders or desires of proper ecclesiastical authority, or without due sanction.

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How did the Synoptists obtain the facts of the temptations of Christ in the wilderness? Would our Lord have explained so intimate an experience to His (then) uncomprehending Apostles? The same question arises with regard to the Agony in the Garden, during which the Apostles were asleep.

The whole narrative of our Lord's fast and temptations implies that He was alone during that time. There is nothing to show when He related the facts to His disciples, if indeed He did so at all. It is unlikely that He would have done so immediately afterwards, as they were still too imperfectly acquainted with His Person and mission. Thus it was not till long afterwards that He began to speak to them of His sufferings and death and we know how badly this was received by them. He may have described the temptations to them at the end of His public life or after His Resurrection. Nor should we exclude the possibility of a revelation made later to the Evangelists, though there seems no need to assume this. Personally, I think that the Evangelists may well have learnt it from our Blessed Lady. Our Lord would have told His Mother many intimate secrets because Her's was the only heart then ready to receive them. Later the time came to reveal them to others. Our Lady spent many years in Jerusalem after our Lord's Ascension, inspiring the infant Church by her presence and her words. She must have been in almost daily contact with the Apostles—of whom, two, were Evangelists, Matthew and John. During this time too she would have been well acquainted with Mark, and later with Luke. This would also explain the account of the Agony in the Garden. But is it necessary to assume that Peter, James and John were asleep the whole time? Indeed in view of the fact that they were trying to keep awake, it seems likely that they saw and heard a good deal of what went on. Moreover, the other Apostles were at the gate and would also have seen something, e.g., the Angel comforting Him.

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