The Call

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IN SOLEMN SERVICE CATHOLICS CLOSE THE CENTURY.

IN the Catholic churches of this city last night services of a most interesting and remarkable character were celebrated. Never before in the lives of the thousands that thronged the sanctuaries was the theme that of last night, and never again will any of those that bowed their heads in prayer do so again for the same purpose. In obedience to the Pope's decree Catholics sought their churches to unite in praise and thanksgiving for the century of life and progress that was closing with the night, and to kneel in hope and pleading for the good that may come with the century that would dawn before the day.

At 7 o'clock the sacred edifices were crowded to the doors. The sanctuaries were adorned as only for the great festivals of the ecclesiastical year. The splendid altars blazed with a wealth of lights and glistening ornaments that returned and reflected their dazzling beauty a thousand fold. Bowers of ferns and palms and choicest flowers made a striking foreground to the gorgeous altars. The scene, beautiful in itself, won new significance from the purpose for which it was created. Here and there superbly robed priests moved to and fro in the various phases of the solemn service that in its dignity and impressiveness was chanted as the last tribute of Catholic Christians to the dying century.

Psalms and songs of praise floated from organs and choirs in answer to the chants of the vesper service. Then all the vast congregations, assembled in many churches, were on their knees to receive the solemn benediction which closed a passing century and welcomed a coming era. Splendid in their ritualism, enhanced by the attending magnificence of light and color and sound, the services charmed the senses and held the imagination. And the words spoken from the pulpits were those of the triumphs and trials, the good and evil, of the hundred years that had been counted into history.

In many of the sanctuaries the imposing ceremonies of the night ended by the singing of the Te Deum by the congregations. The time and the occasion, the vast throngs that flocked to so many places of worship, the splendor of decoration and gorgeousness of ceremonial made the event one that will be long remembered in San Francisco.

By authority of the Pope's decree the Catholics of this city could have participated in the sacrifice of a midnight mass in their churches. Such a spectacle is unknown to the generation and it was feared that the churches would be overtaxed and that some accident might happen. Vicar General Prendergast decided therefore that no mass would be celebrated in any of the large local sanctuaries. In private chapels, however, there was no restriction, and in them at the hour of midnight, at the very meeting of the centuries, hundreds of little communities met at convent shrines to offer their praise and worship.

In connection with these remarkable ceremonies the controversy regarding the close of the century has received a local interest. Rev. Father Peter C. Yorke, whose opinion naturally is entitled to great consideration, says that the century unquestionably closed last night at midnight and will not continue until midnight of December 31 of this year, as most of his disputants insist. The reverend gentleman argues that the Christian era began with the birth of Christ and not when the Savior was 1 year of age; that in our calculations we must begin with the year naught and not with the year one. If this calculation be observed we will not count our years until we have passed them and when we register the year 1900 we have recorded the passage of nineteen centuries.

THE GLORY OF A CENTURY NOW DEAD

In no other Catholic church in the city perhaps were the services in honor of the closing century more imposing than they were at St. Peter's Church. The sacred edifice was splendidly adorned as if for the greatest festival of the ecclesiastical year. Myriads of lights glistened and flashed upon the altars. Palms and rare plants shed their fragrance and gave new beauty to the sanctuary. The service was as imposing and as dignified as a splendid ritual could endow it. Solemn vespers, the benediction and the Te Deum were chanted in honor of the century that was dying.

The pastor, Rev. Father Peter C. Yorke, was eloquent in his sermon of the night. His theme was the century that was dying. In part he spoke as follows:

"At the behest of the Holy Father, my brethren, we celebrate this the last day of the old year with solemn prayer and thanksgiving. Not only do we close the year, but we close the century. Therefore there is a special reason why we should look back on the past hundred years and glorify God, who has done such great things for his church and people.

"A hundred years ago the moral world looked as the physical world may have looked after the great deluge. The foundations of the great deep had been broken up and the French revolution had swept away the ancient landmarks in church and state. Never had things looked so black. Infidelity, brutal and brutalizing, was rampant in the countries that had remained faithful during the reformation. In Protestant lands Catholics were the survivors of three centuries of persecution—cowed, timid, without money, without votes, without influence—the pebbles, as Newman says—the detritus of the great deluge. In America the Latin countries were tainted with the same disease as the motherlands. In the United States we were but a handful, deprived in most of the States of our rights as citizens or but newly enfranchised. Never had the Papacy sunk so low. If it were possible for the church to fall the beginning of the century saw her failure.

"The darkest hour was before the dawn. When the storm was at its height God was sweetly disposing all things for his own good purposes. The early years of the century saw the restoration of morality and religion to France. Napoleon recognized that there could be no state unless God was recognized and he brought back the church, not for love of the church, but because he thought he could use her. When he tried to bend her to his ambition he found himself face to face with a power he could not conquer. The Pope went into prison rather than betray the trust committed to him by Christ. Napoleon fell as fall all those who make war on God, but the Papacy remained. His dynasty has gone forever, but the church is still there.

"Not since the time when the prophet saw the dry bones come together and live was there such an awakening as that of the church in English-speaking countries. When the century was beginning Daniel O'Connell was cherishing the dream of restoring liberty to his fellow Irishmen. The first quarter of the century saw his struggle. He is the hero of religious liberty in English-speaking lands. He is the one leader who took it as his text and made it his life work. He succeeded, and the tremendous growth of the Church in Ireland and Great Britain, in Canada and Australia is the result of Daniel O'Connell's agitation.

INSPIRING SCENE IN ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL.

"To him and to his methods we owe the great campaigns in favor of religious liberty carried on by Montalembert in France and Windthorst in Germany. The result of these campaigns was to prove to the world that the ancient church had, like the eagle, renewed her youth. Her children were as devoted as ever, her influence as potent, her doctrine as inspiring. Compare the condition of the church in Europe in the year 1800 with her condition now, on the threshold of the year 1900. Then she lay, like the temple, desolate. The Gentiles trod her ruined courts and the sacrifice seemed to be ended forever. To-day her walls are lifted up in beauty. She resounds with the voice of gladness. Her children throng round the altar and the sacrifice is offered up from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, for the Lord hath promised the gates of hell shall not prevail.

"If the resurrection of the church in the old world has been wondrous, not less wondrous has been its planting and its growth here in this new republic. A hundred years ago we were nothing in the domain covered by the United States—some 80,000 of Irish and English descent in Maryland and Pennsylvania, a few French missionaries with the Indians in the West, the ruined pueblos of the southwest and the chain of missions along the Californian coast. In a hundred years we have not only kept pace with the growth of population, but we have outstripped it. We have met prejudice and persecution, but they fought against us in vain. In the beginning we were despised and hated, then we were feared and hated; now men wonder at us, but hate us none the less. The Catholic has his position in American life too secure to be ever seriously menaced, and the wisest of those who are outside recognize that we alone have a religion big enough for a big country.

"Therefore we have reason to rejoice and be glad, not for selfish or personal reasons, but because we believe that God has established his church for the benefit of mankind, and that it is to the advantage of all men to belong to that church. 'I would to God,' said the apostle, 'that both in a little and in much, not only thou but also all that hear me this day should become such as I also am, except these bands.' That is our prayer for our fellow citizens. The hope of that consummation tinges our prayers and our thanksgivings. The shepherd stands upon the mountains and numbers his sheep. May he grant that before the new century ends his prophecy shall be fulfilled and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

SOLEMN SERVICES AT THE CATHEDRAL

The closing of the century was commemorated by the most solemn and impressive services at St. Mary's Cathedral, Van Ness avenue and O'Farrell street, last night. There were vespers and the benediction, with the special feature of the "Te Deum." Rev. Father Prendergast preached a sermon appropriate to the occasion.

Nearly every pew in the big cathedral was occupied. The music was superb, especially the solos. Father Prendergast dwelt in his sermon upon the perishability of time, and sought to impress upon the congregation the importance and the duty of taking advantage of the precious gfit of God. He said in part:

"As we are about to pass over the threshold of another year and into a new century it behooves us to look back and see what use we have made of the time that has gone, and from what we find form strong resolutions for our betterment during the year to come. Another year has passed and another is now before us. Whether it will be for us or against us, for weal or for woe, is for you to determine. Another year is coming on, during which, maybe, there are some among us who are doomed to destruction. Time is the gift of God. Every minute, every hour, every day, every year comes from him who controls all things. God is the source of life and the whole creation. Time—so perishable and yet so precious—is the gift of our Lord and Father. The good that it is to us can be measured by its duration, the spiritual benefit we take from it and the moral exultation we receive. It partakes of the immensity of eternity.

"Why do men rejoice and exchange congratulations on New Year's day? Is it because another year has rolled by and that their allotted portion of time has been shortened to that extent?. Do those who cheer and congratulate stop to think? No one knows how much further the weary pilgrimage may go or when the soul may pass to the master. Our joy should not permit us to lose sight of our spiritual welfare or to forget to look back and from the lessons and mistakes of the past prepare ourselves for the future. Time obliterates many things. The deeds of our greatest heroes are forgotten, and there are but few true hearts that beat responsive to their names. Their memory has perished with the day. To us all that remains of the past is our accountability for sin and our reward for our sacrifices.

"This is the time for resolutions for good. Let us not write them in the sand. Write them deeper. Engrave them on our souls. Do not put off until to-morrow what you should do to-day, and what you do, do well."

FATHER WYMAN AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH

The Paulist Fathers at St. Mary's Church made a special feature of their usual vesper service last night. At the close of the benediction the German choral "Te Deum" was sung by the choir, composed of sopranos, Miss Paula, Miss Higgins and Miss Johnson; contraltos, Miss Josie Murphy and Miss Nettie Johnson; tenors, W. Moore and Dr. J. F. Smith; basso, W. G. O'Brien; organist, Miss Giorgiani. The sermon was preached by the Rev. Father Wyman. He said in part:

"This is a special year in the Catholic church. The holy Father in Rome has ordered that the opening of the new century shall be recognized by a midnight mass or the day is to be marked with some special form of praise. The services to-night will be followed by the singing of the "Te Deum" as a sign of our thankfulness to God for his kindly guardianship over us in the past. God has given great blessings to the Christian people in the past and the great blessings that we may hope God will send will be ours if we are only faithful.

"God works, as we know, in hidden yet most effective ways, for the benefit of his people. The benefits of God are known and most deeply appreciated by those who think seriously and most desire those things which are of lasting value. The superficial mind does not always see what is most real and substantial and as a rule has little appreciation of what it receives. On the other hand, those who are guided by divine wisdom find in the acts of providence infinitely more blessings than it is possible to suppose God would give to such weak creatures as we are."

IMPRESSIVE MUSIC AT ST. IGNATIUS

Services in St. Ignatius Church last night were solemn and beautiful. The sacred edifice was brilliantly lighted and was crowded with worshipers who offered up thanks for blessings received during the past year, and prayed for a continuance of them during the next twelve months. Rev. Father Prelato, S. J., recited the Rosary and Litany and then vespers, the responses being made by Rev. Angelo Cotelli, S. J. The choir augmented for the occasion by the ladies' sodality choir rendered sweet music during the services. Rev. Father Frieden, S. J., delivered the sermon. It was an eloquent effort and touched the auditors. In part he said:

"We have assembled before God's altar to-night to thank the Almighty for the good things that have come to us in the course of the year which is now drawing to its close. Yes, the year is well nigh passed—out a few hours to remain. It is for the last time in the year '99 that the preacher speaks to you from this pulpit; the last time you adore our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and receive his benediction. And what has become of the year? The days which it was made of are no more—they have passed to eternity. And with the passing time, we ourselves have passed; and at the close of the year we are one year nearer to eternity.

"God grant to the members of this religious community and to all those who have recourse to our ministrations a season of virtue and holiness; a time of such happiness as can be had here below. May we share in that sweet contentment of soul, in that precious peace, which indeed the world cannot give, but which is the heavenly heritage of men of good will. May the divine blessing descend upon your household and may it ever dwell there. May the great God bless those whose descending years remind them that eternity is not far off; and may he bless the young, lest the health and strength of body that God has bestowed prove the ruin of their virtue; may the Almighty guide and bless the rich, that they may prize the wealth of a holy life and cling to the treasures of heavenly merit; and may the same sweet Lord graciously bless and console the needy, that their poverty may help them to lay up to themselves treasures in heaven. May he, who is so truly the Father of all, bless you and yours when you are in health, and may he bless you more abundantly when sickness visits your houses; may the blessings of God be upon you in the day of joy and prosperity, and may it not depart from you when in the unsearchable ways of Providence the hand of the Lord has touched you.

"That these blessings may come to you, my dear brethren, we pray. And so we wish you, from the bottom of our hearts, a happy and holy new year—in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

At the conclusion of the singing of the Te Deum there was solemn benediction.

LESSONS THE OLD YEAR TEACHES US

At St. Francis Church, Vallejo street and Montgomery avenue, the New Year was observed at the evening vesper service. Father McMahon preached the sermon. He said: "My dear people assembled here together at the call of the Holy Father. We all rejoice for the blessings we have received in the past and we should also ask for a renewal of the blessings in the future. The new year should remind us that we are only here for a short time. It is certain that we all must die, and we shall then be judged for our good and bad deeds. It is appointed that we must die. The patriarchs lived for over a hundred years, but even they were mortal. So will all the future generations die. The church bell tolls for our friends, but who can tell how soon will the same bell toll for us. God has mapped out our lives and the time when he has decided to call us. The man who laughs and says 'Eat, drink and be merry' may be the first one called. We may ask ourselves, shall I go while I am walking on the street? Shall I receive the sacraments?

"We cannot answer these questions. But it will help us in our life, if as we say our evening prayers we study ourselves and find out if we are prepared. On the eve of the nineteenth century let us make new resolutions to lead better lives. We may not know which of us may soon die who is now sitting in this church. The young as well as the old are just as liable to get the death summons."

At the close of the sermon and the benediction, a solemn Te Deum was sung by the choir. The choir was composed of: Sopranos, Miss Ina Collins, Miss Dowling, Miss Paullissen and Miss Madden; altos, Miss M. Foley and Miss L. V. Lautin; tenor, W. A. Schmidt, and basso, M. Riley.