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THE BRIDGE BUILDERS OF THE CITY OF GOD

SOUVENIR OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE RIGHT REV. E. B. LEDVINA, D.D., AS BISHOP OF CORPUS CHRISTI, FROM THE CATHOLIC CHURCH EXTENSION SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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Discourse pronounced on the occasion of the Consecration of the Rt. Rev. Emmanuel B. Ledvina, D.D. as Bishop of Corpus Christi, Texas, at St. Mary's of-the-Woods, Indiana, June 14th, 1921, by the Right Rev. Francis C. Kelley, S. T. D., LL. D., Protonotary Apostolic.

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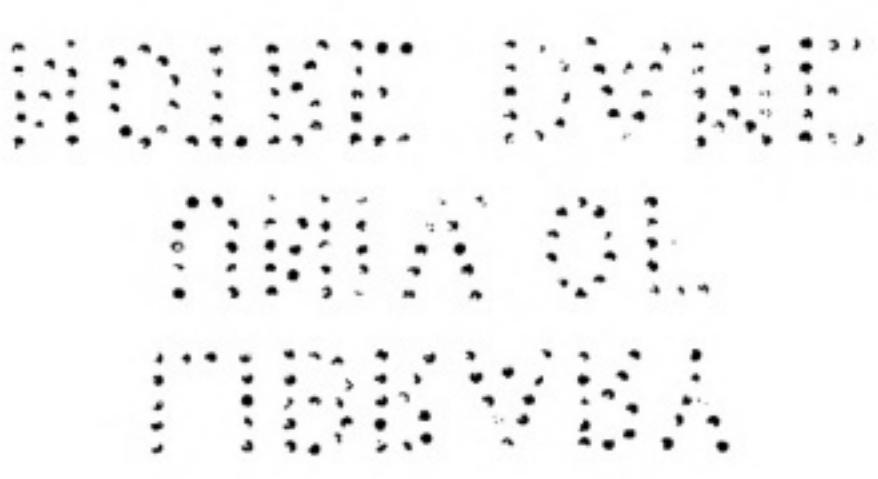

The Bridge Builders of the City of God

"Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations, and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build, and to plant."—Jeremiah, 1, 10.

Most Reverend, Right Reverend and Reverend Fathers, Venerable Sisters, Dear Brethren:

Modestus, favorite of the Emperor Valens, sent by his master to St. Basil, Bishop of Cesaria, whose feast is celebrated this day, to command him to accept Arianism, was surprised to receive this intrepid answer: "My Emperor is God, and He forbids me to obey a wicked order. As a creature I owe first obedience to my Creator." "What then," said Modestus, "if I confiscate your goods?" "Since I have no goods, how can you confiscate them?" replied Basil. "But if I exile you?" the courtier threatened. "All this earth," answered Basil, "is a place of exile." Astonished at the boldness of the bishop's speech to a representative of the powerful Emperor, Modestus angrily exclaimed;

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"Never before have I heard such language." The holy pride of Basil in the dignity and strength of his office arose in him; and his words became those of the entire Episcopate of the Catholic Church, past, present and future. "Then," he said, "Never before have you met a bishop."

St. Augustine used a phrase in his learned writings that has often since been taken as a motto for the heraldic bearings of many of his fellow-bishops: "*Ideo victor, quia victima*—Therefore a victor, because a victim." Strange words these! Do they apply to the Episcopate of the Catholic Church as did the proud words of Basil? Quite evidently yes, since so many Catholic bishops have placed them near enough to their persons to keep their lesson in constant memory.

More than once has the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, which we know chiefly for the sublime Lamentations, been called upon to supply a text applicable to the consecration of a Catholic bishop. So it serves me now: "Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations, and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build, and to plant." Do these words also apply to the Catholic Episcopate? I answer that, as bishops are successors of the Prophets as well as of the Apostles, the words apply to them.

From the defiance of St. Basil, from the motto contributed by St. Augustine to his brethren, from the text of Jeremiah, comes the conviction that, in the glory and the joy of this occasion, there is a note of dread. St. Basil's pride was not so much for his own dignity, as for the ability in those who bore it

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to face trials and sufferings. St. Augustine's words picture triumphant crosses on old and on new Calvaries. The text of Jeremiah sends a warning down the years from the prophets, that he who is a ruler in Israel, must bend his back to bitter service for Israel.

What, then, is this terrible office that gave inspiration to Basil to confound an Emperor with a dozen words, which, shot down the centuries from the lips that spoke them, remain an ever-living testimony to the greatness of soul and the fidelity of the mitred rulers of the Church of God? What is this office that makes living victims of those who receive it, yet lifts them to heights of glory never reached by conquerors? What is the labor that can only be constructive by first being destructive? rather, that out of destruction builds and plants? The answer is that the Episcopate is one of the greatest of the paradoxes of God; a princely office to which princes are seldom called; an office of dignity that can be successfully filled only by humility, carrying with it as it does, at once the purple of royalty and the rags of the beggar; an office of authority, whose possessor is the one most frequently attacked in this world, even by those bound to render obedience to him. The Episcopate is a blessing and a burden; a joy and a sorrow; a crown of jewels and a crown of thorns; a supreme opportunity and a supreme responsibility.

Have I not said enough to awaken your attention and deep interest in an attempt to answer the question now ready on your lips: What really is a Catholic bishop? He is a Pastor and a Pontiff. Under these two titles we shall look at him today, first

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asking light through the intercession of Our Lady of this Shrine, appropriately the scene of the consecration of a Pastor and Pontiff destined in a distant field to renew its own wonderful missionary history.

I.

Jesus Christ, Whom St. Paul calls "the Pastor and Bishop of your souls," came into this world to do the very things set forth in the words of Jeremiah. He destroyed to build. His mission was to destroy the towers of Babylon and to build the City of God. The City of God is built for men, as the fortress of the supernatural life. Supernatural life alone can save men; alone can make men happy; alone can strengthen men to the end of reaching their eternal destiny. Supernatural life is God's gift, which cannot be merited, but must be accepted and guarded. There are bridges and roads from the City of God over which it comes to men. These bridges and roads are the possessions of the Church established by Jesus Christ. The bishop is the one who guards the gates to them, who opens and shuts according to needs and conditions. He is, therefore, a pastor and a servant of God's elect. A portion of Christ's flock is confided to him. He has his assistant pastors and servants; but on him falls the chief responsibility. So he is above his priests in power and in dignity. Why?

The bishop alone has the power to confer all the Sacraments. A priest may receive us as children of God in Holy Baptism, but a bishop, confirming us in that happy state, gives us the Sacrament of Strength, and thereby makes us full-armed Christians. To the

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voice of the priest is Our Lord obedient when He is called to come down upon the altar in the Great Sacrifice, and to absolve from sin; but the Holy Ghost is obedient to the voice of the bishop when he calls Him to enter and take possession of a soul enlisted in the Army of God. The bishop is, then, the human custodian of the graces of the Sanctifier, of the Comforter and of the Teacher of all Truth.

The priest receives both his powers from the bishop in ordination, and the right to use them in jurisdiction. The bishop is the channel through which they pass. But he is also the channel of greater powers, since he alone can consecrate other bishops. Prefiguring a River of Life in the Church, was the River of Life in the Garden of Paradise. That River of Life in the Church is the stream of the Apostolic Succession. The bishops are at once the banks that guard it and the bed over which it passes. Without the bishops it would be lost in the swamps of discord, and disappear in the sands of the desert of indifference.

It is plain, then, that the bishop is the mouthpiece of the Church to his people. The head and chief of the bishops, the successor of Peter, is the Vicar of Jesus Christ; but he is first a bishop. All other bishops he addresses as his "Venerable Brethren," while he addresses priests as his "Beloved Sons." He, Vicar of Christ, speaks as Peter spoke, for his brethren, since he is their ruler, yet also is he one of themselves. They are the special servants of God, and he is the Servant of the Servants of God. In him is the infallibility that guards the purity of the Faith and the integrity of the moral law: but in all

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the bishops, united to him, rests also this infallibility. So the bishop is the Doctor by excellence. Though learned men who are not bishops may be teachers, yet the purity of their doctrine is guarded by the bishops; for the right of guardianship in the bishop comes from a higher source than science. The bishops keep the defences of the Christian Church.

Great as are the powers, high as is the dignity of a bishop as pastor, yet his right to rule is the strong citadel of the gifts of God to the people. It is his jurisdiction that protects these gifts. He is, therefore, over priests and people. To that he must take heed, as St. Paul warns him, for he is set "to rule the Church of God." It is here that he must invoke the sources of strength that he needs for himself as a ruler. It is here that we note the strange paradox of a necessary humility in dignity as the best preserver of a necessary authority in action. The saintly Fenelon, in his letter to the Elector of Cologne, upon whom he was to lay the hands of consecration, expresses this well and warningly; "We (bishops) must be meek and humble of heart, firm without haughtiness, and condescending without weakness; poor and vile in our own eyes in the grandeur inseparable from our state, not allowing to this grandeur any more than what we have no right to refuse to it."

It is plain that the bishop as a chief pastor is the guardian of the spiritual rights of his priests and of their flocks, but he is more. He is the vigilant sentry to prevent the intrusion of worldly ambitions and worldly questions into their spiritual interests. In this he is constantly aided by the admonitions of the

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Sovereign Pontiffs. None of these admonitions have greater interest in this connection than one of the very latest, indicating clearly the mind of the present Holy Father on this grave matter. Writing to the bishops of Belgium regarding an unfortunate language dispute which had already assumed political importance, Benedict XV clearly says: "The most serious evil is that the clergy, by taking part in these bitter quarrels, lose their dignity and compromise the efficiency of their sacred ministry. Their line of conduct is well defined by St. Paul in the passage where he outlines the obligations of the priesthood. 'The priest,' he says, 'is taken from among men, is ordained to God.' Hence it is obvious that the duties of the priest have a divine character, and that consequently the authority of his ministry should never be placed at the service of human interests. And, although the priest is not prohibited from enjoying the civic rights of other citizens, he is forbidden to use them in a manner which would injure the efficiency of his ministry." Wise words, indeed, and indicating plainly the charge that is laid upon bishops as chief pastors, both by precept and example, to keep the Christian priesthood as a class set apart for God's work.

The crosier placed in the hand of the new bishop today is, then, emblematic of his pastoral office. It indicates his right to rule, but more his duty to guide. It is not a staff to support his steps, but a marshal's baton with which to point the way. The crook that crowns it is not a weight with which to strike, but an instrument to draw his charges from danger. Ecclesiastical writers compare the crosier to the sceptre of kings, but not with strict justice; for not so is its

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origin, not so the symbolism of its form. The Pope carries no crosier. Peter gave his staff to a disciple to raise the dead to life. Peter's successor authorizes the crosier being given today, as a sign of a duty to correct, to judge, to promote virtue, to censure and to save from evil. What is this but to heal spiritual sickness, to raise to life again souls dead to sanctifying grace?

II.

Important as is the office of a bishop as pastor of souls, yet for the Church his title and rights as a pontiff are more important still. As a chief pastor he is intimately concerned with the government and care of only a small part of the flock. As pontiff the bishop has his obligations towards the whole Church.

What is a pontiff? Far back into the mists of early history we would have to go to trace the origin and development of this dignity; but the meaning of the word will suffice to show us what the title implies in its possessor. The word "pontiff," or "pontifex," means a bridge-builder. In the early days of pagan Rome there were six pontiffs; later fifteen, and, under Julius Caesar, sixteen. The office was a religious one; but it included the care of the bridges over the Tiber, and formed a Supreme Court with jurisdiction over all cases connected with religion. It is the signification of the title upon which I wish especially to dwell.

The care of the bridges of ancient Rome was essential to the safety of the City, for the Tiber was its strong line of defense. To watch the bridges was to stand guard over the people. Later, when

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Rome became a conquering nation, the bridges took on a new importance, since over them passed the victorious armies of the Empire and the returning triumphs. All of Rome's power and of Rome's glory had a connection with the bridges of the Tiber. Still later came a new dignity to the bridges of Rome. By them passed prefects and governors from the City with the decrees and laws of the Empire of the World. In return came tribute over the bridges. All armies, rulers and laws, crossed the bridges to or from the great military roads that bound the Empire together. The bridges united the Empire to its centre; united the provinces to the Capitol.

The day came when a stranger foot touched the bridges of the Tiber, a foot "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace," and a new destiny entered Rome with Peter. Wonder that the Seven Hills did not tremble with joy that day, to welcome one who was so soon to be the glory of the City built upon them. But Peter came in the poverty of Bethlehem, and men knew him as little as they had known his Master. Yet Peter was to be known better than the Caesars. He was to snatch from the flames that destroyed the Empire the human means of building better and stronger an Empire not of the dust but of the soul. He was to begin the reign of a new line of pontiffs, whose chief would sit in Rome, but whose brethren would make new Romes in lands that old Rome could never reach. His statue was one day to top a column erected to the glory of a pagan emperor. It still stands in Trajan's Forum, looking down on the remains of the basilica of the Ulpia wherein Constantine announced his acceptance

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of Christianity. His name was to be given to a temple the like of which old Rome had not dreamed of, even in the days of her greatest grandeur. His laws were to replace the statutes of Augustus. His sign, the sign of the Crucified, was to rise on the Janiculum with his blood flowing over it, as a sign of conquest, a sign of that new line of pontiffs who with him could say: *"Ideo victor, quia victima."*

Out across the bridges of Rome soon passed the brethren of Peter upon whom his hands had been laid, the missionaries of the Gospel of Christ to a waiting world, soldiers of the Army of Peace. The miracle of Christianity, the conflict and the triumph of it, glorified anew the bridges of the Eternal City.

Another day came when a bridge of Rome saw a blood-stained and worn out civilization go from power unequaled into the dust and shadow of the grave. It was the Milvian Bridge, around which surged the fight of Constantine and Maxentius. Within sight of its red-soaked planks rose the Labarum that replaced the Eagles. The Cross triumphed, and the bridge-builders of paganism began that day to die. The Pontifex Maximus is now the Bishop of Rome. The lesser Bridge-Builders are the bishops of the Church Universal. It is that relationship to the Church which is the highest honor of a Christian bishop, for it marks the Catholicity of his title and his office. It gives him a Catholic duty to the Church Catholic, higher even than his duty to his own diocese. Nothing, then, that is of interest to the preaching of the Gospel everywhere, to the growth and extension of the Church Universal, can be thought alien to a true Christian bishop. His particular duty and interest may be in one part of the vineyard of the Lord, but he is the bridge-builder and the bridge-keeper, the Pontifex. The great roads to the uttermost ends of the earth stretch before him

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where the bridges touch the opposite shore. He must help equip and speed the Army of Christ that passes over them, welcome and refresh the soldiers coming back to the Triumph.

It is here that the dignity of the bishop as pontiff rises to its greatest height of splendor and usefulness, for it is the missionary obligation attached to the office that is the Church's first mark and sign of truth—Unity. The bishops of the Catholic Church form an unbreakable chain around the whole body of Christian doctrine, around the entire Fold of Christ. Their Chief, the Sovereign Pontiff, is the lock on that chain. The Key is Christ Himself; and the Keeper of the Key is the Eternal Father Who sent Him. So the bishop is consecrated a bishop forever. Whatever be his worthiness or unworthiness he remains a link by the fact of his forging. He cannot get away from his episcopal character. If he leaves the chain he loses his usefulness but not the temper of the iron of which he is made. Every new link marks growth in the Fold that is encircled. New links also constantly replace those that may be lost, or taken away by death, for the Holy Ghost is the Watcher and it is He Who forges each link and guards the integrity of the chain. "I shall send the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth," says Christ, "Who will teach you all things and abide with you forever."

The great pontifical obligation been sometimes partially lost sight of by chief pastors immersed in the laborious cares of their particular charges. But it is not meet to lose sight of the World for the sake even of the City. The cause of Christ is universal. There should be no weak links on the chain. It is the pontiff who must be the inspiration of the Missions. It is the pontiff who must have the world vision. For it was chiefly to the pontiff that Christ said: "Preach the Gospel to every creature." The pontiff

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is the Apostle. There is a sovereign remedy available then for the cure of all our weaknesses. It is the healing and helping hand of the Catholic Episcopate. Archimedes said that he could move the world if he had a fulcrum and a lever. We have both the fulcrum and the lever to move it for Christ. The fulcrum is Catholic Truth. The lever is Catholic Missions. But the hand that must press the lever is the hand of the pontiff, a successor of the Apostles, consecrated for the office and work of a bishop in the Church of God.

Do I need to cite proofs to show that this is the true conception of the bishop as pontiff? I have already hinted at two striking ones. Every Catholic bishop shares, when united to the Pontifex Maximus —the Pope—in the government of the Church Universal: for it is the bishops who are called into the Ecumenical Councils, which mark as milestones the history of Christianity. No matter how learned the doctor who goes to them, he goes only as an adviser to the bishop. The responsibility rests not on the doctor, but on the bishop. And again, the bishop, united to the Pontifex Maximus, shares also with him the infallibility that guards to the City of God the purity of the deposit of Faith. If all men must "believe and be baptized" in order to attain the supernatural life of grace and consequent salvation, there must be a divinely preserved force to keep the gates and bridges. The supreme exercise of that force is in the Pontifex Maximus, with his brother pontiffs, the bishops of the Catholic Church.

The note of dread steals then very distinctly from out the music of this great rejoicing. We are glad that a new link is forged for the great chain: but we know the strain that shall surely test it, and the strength the trial will demand. We rejoice not in the task nor in the test, but in the confidence we

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share with the Church that this new pastor and pontiff shall not fail. It is our sureness of him that takes away the sad thought of the battle he must fight. It is because we have learned what manner of a man and a priest he was, that we can be glad in anticipation of what manner of a pastor and pontiff he shall be. It is because we foresee fidelity, strength and justice in the bishop that we can say farewell so happily to the priest who was our brother. For all I speak the sad yet joyful words of parting.

But for myself in particular I shall not say a full Good-bye to you, my dear colleague, for we are not to be entirely separated. We shall live in the same house, even though you must gather with those of the Upper Chamber into which comes the Spirit of the Fiery Tongues. I shall hear below the thunder of the great wind that marks His advent; and, even though I shall not see the flame, I shall, pray God, always feel in my heart the warmth of it. How, then, could I think that this is a parting? All the years that we worked side by side have been years of peace and mutual understanding. You have given wise counsel in these years. Why should I lose it now when, a consecrated channel of the Seven Gifts, you can give it better than ever? Or is your place in that Upper Chamber so pleasant an one that you could ever forget the familiar post in which you proved your worth? From labor you go to labor, and to that new labor you carry the heart that learned so well in Church Extension the beat of sympathetic understanding. Neither shall I mourn that the old post sees you no longer, for you will still be there in the traditions you helped to make. For the loyal service that the Society has received of your head, heart and hands I thank you, in the name of the dead and the living Chancellor, in the name of the Governors and of all your colleagues. Their prayer for

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you is sincere and heartfelt. I speak it as I am sure they would have it uttered.

O Thou, Who "watching over Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers," hast given this day a new ruler to Thy Church, a new prince and successor to her Apostles, hast opened again the horn of oil to consecrate a pointiff, as once, by the hand of Thy servant Samuel, Thou did'st raise up David to kingship, for the glory and pride of Thy people. As with that Royal Prophet Thou did'st stoop to choose a shepherd boy to wear a crown, today Thou hast chosen one whose life was given to the lowly duty of helping shepherds, to wear on his brow the mitre of a pontiff, and to carry in his hands the staff of a chief pastor. But Thou hast chosen one whose heart turns in loyalty to the City of Thy choice, the City set upon the seven everlasting hills, the City of the bridges, the City Eternal; one whose fidelity has been tested "as gold in the furnace." Thou hast returned Thy confidence for a great love, Thy love for a consuming and wise zeal in Thy service. And I, who have known this Thy Servant, by whose side he has worked for fourteen long and happy years, take new courage from the inspiration of this day to speak for all others who also have known him, and to pray that he shall always be to Thy Church a servant worthy to enter into Thy joy, a pontiff worthy to guard Thy people. Give him strength to uproot and pull down, to lay waste and destroy error, corruption and sin. Confirm him in the knowledge and prudence needed to build up Thy Church and plant the seeds of Thy Truth in his people. Give him strength of arm, courage of heart and intrepidity of soul. Give him the gift of seeing justice and measuring as he sees. Give him length of days in Thy service. Give him, above all, the wide vision of Thy earthly kingdom, and the wider charity that shall make of him a bishop, a pontiff, a missionary, after Thine own Heart. Amen.

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