

Manton, Joseph E.
Give him a thought
ADU 1142

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Thought

Rev. Joseph Manton, C.S.S.R.

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BY

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A series of Sunday evening addresses given in December, 1948, on the "Catholic Hour", a coast-to-coast religious broadcast produced by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company.



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC MEN
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington 5, D. C.

Printed and distributed by Our Sunday Visitor
Huntington, Indiana



Nihil Obstat:

REV. T. E. DILLON

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:

✠ JOHN FRANCIS NOLL, D.D.

Bishop of Fort Wayne

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A NEW CHANCE

Address delivered on December 5, 1948

In this modern age when undertakers have become morticians, and barbers tonsorial artists, and street cleaners sanitary engineers, it is reassuring to remember that a pawn-shop is still . . . a pawn-shop. The painted wooden Indian no longer stands sentinel before the cigar stores. The huge shoe that used to swing in the wind outside the cobbler's door is now likely to be a pink neon sign proclaiming "Ye Bootie Shoppe." But, at least it is nice to recall that, almost alone in a changing world, the three balls still gleam above the pawn shop—the gilded shamrock glittering over the city streets.

I bring up this matter of pawn-shops because December 6 happens to be the Feast of the Saint who is the patron of pawn-shops, at least in an indirect way. His name is St. Nicholas. Now everybody knows that through the friction of use and the erosion of time, St. Nicholas has become Saint Niklaus, and finally Santa Claus; though the original St. Nicholas, a kindly old Bishop of southern Italy, would have blinked gentle astonishment at

the notion of chauffering chimney-minded reindeer on a gusty Christmas Eve. However, he did have the habit of leaving presents with something of a flourish. Once he tossed three purses of gold into a poor man's window so that the three daughters would have a dowry and could enter into honorable marriage. Well, the story got around, and naturally it grew, and by the time it reached Lombardy in the North, the Bishop had heaved into the window three bulging bags of gold. Who should then adopt St. Nicholas as their patron—he was dead by now—but the money lenders of Lombardy! And over their banking houses blossomed the three golden balls which the cynical interpret as "two to one you won't get it back."

But there is a very sober side to a pawn-shop. Every pawn-shop window is a pathetic little history of humanity — of human vanities and hobbies and treasures and failures. Behind the black-grilled gates folded across the front, somebody's happiness is there in jail, waiting to be bailed out. Look at the windows:

watches and fishing rods and cameras and diamond rings; pearl-handled revolvers and blue-barrelled rifles; binoculars that however powerful still could see no hope in the future; the inevitable mandolin that once knew merry tinkling nights; in fact musical instruments enough to equip a little orchestra. You wonder what the window would look like if all the owners took their places behind them. And inside this shop where there is no merriment, perhaps a man with a black coat and a cold appraising eye, and a faint, carved smile like the smile of the king in a pack of cards.

Every now and then they pick up a dead vagrant, in the Bowery of New York or the South End of Boston, and in his pocket perhaps nothing but a couple of pawn tickets. You can read the story there. He gave up something valuable, maybe a handsome ring; and now all that is left is a soiled bit of paper. Oh, there was something else, there were the few dollars he got, but they slipped through his fingers like water—water or something stronger. But isn't this the very process of sin? In a way, the Devil is a Pawn-broker. He takes your soul, your innocence, your clean conscience, sparkling and

clear as a white diamond, and he gives you some sensual pleasure that is gone like the flare of a match, and you have nothing but a soiled memory, a little stub of remorse that never lets you forget that you have given up something precious, and you will never be really happy till you get it back—because *it belongs to you!*

Some patrons of the pawnshop redeem their little diamond regularly — say once a month. They have it for a few days and then, after a wild time, they go on the rocks and their diamond goes in hock. So it goes with their little treasure month after month; in and out, in and out. But most of the time it is in the pawn-broker's safe, and they carry nothing with them but a nagging reminder. There are people like that, too, on the street of life, with souls in pawn. They don't really own their own soul. If possession is nine-tenths of the law, nine-tenths of the time it is in possession of the Devil. I mean people who come not to grated doors of the pawnshop, but to the grilled screen of the confessional, perhaps every couple of months, and redeem their shining innocence, their peace of conscience, their soul. But a few days later, they have

pawned it for pleasure, and the rest of the month they do not have it — have nothing but a guilty conscience to remind them that their soul is in the Devil's keeping.

However, underline this difference heavily. If you leave anything in a pawn-shop, say even an overcoat, your Uncle there will take better care of it than you would. It will be hung very neatly, securely locked up against thieves, carefully stored away so that it will never become a Blueplate Special for moths. You'll get your pawned overcoat back in a superb condition. But it isn't like that in the Devil's Pawn-shop. The more often your soul goes over the counter of sin, the longer it stays in that musty and mouldering vault of bad habits, the more it deteriorates; the thinner, the weaker, the more flimsy and sleazy it becomes. And when you really need it, it just won't stand up.

If you were to ask me what is the best season for the pawn-shop, I would tell you that in times of depression, pawn-brokers are never depressed. It is the same with the soul. In periods of personal depression, or discouragement, people will slink into the little shop of sin, who in a

happier hour would briskly pass it by. Self-pity is the side door of sin. It isn't all lit up in the front like Glamorous Temptation, but it gets us in just the same. When we are down in spirits, our only hope is to go up in spirit to God! If something has got us down, the best thing is to go down further—on our knees. It may not settle our problem, but it will settle our soul. and when we stand up, we shall be better able to stand up to our trouble. If depression is the pawn-shop's best season, Monday is its busiest day. Ask the pay envelope—the pay envelope that was so fat on Friday night, but over the week-end went through some strenuous reducing exercises. Too much dice or cards, dogs or horses, Scotch or Rye—this was the dumb-bell reducing routine that took the bulge off the little bank-roll. And by the same token, isn't the soul weakest over the week-end? Aren't more souls sold out, more sin committed, innocence bartered, self-respect surrendered, ideals given up, resolutions broken, promises forgotten, and commandments shattered *over the week-end?* Wouldn't it be better if we all took a tip from experience and were doubly careful on doubly dan-

gerous days? This is not a sour indictment of wholesome recreation. Real religion flourishes under the bright banner of Joy. But like mushrooms and toadstools, there is often a deadly difference between pleasure and happiness. It simply means we have to pick our recreations carefully especially over the week-end.

Theoretically, every article in a pawn-shop is waiting to be *redeemed*. Did you ever wonder what happens to the unredeemed articles? After a certain time they are disposed of at public auction, almost like a little General Judgment. But first the owner has to be warned. He is given a chance to salvage what he has given over. God acts in pretty much the same way with people who have given over their souls to sin, people whose souls are in pawn. He gives His own warning. Sometimes it is death tapping on the shoulder and beckoning away someone who only yesterday strode briskly at our side. Sometimes it is a spell of sickness flinging us on our back and letting us see how different the world looks when viewed from the horizontal. But always it whispers, "This life is only a bridge between a brief here and an eternal hereafter. How foolish

to concentrate on the bridge and forget the goal!"

But what good would be the warning—that souls in sin, souls in pawn must be redeemed before that Final Auction, if we do not have the means to redeem them? Truly enough, of course we have not. But across the scarlet horizon of the world of sin, out of the merciful bosom of God there walks toward us His only Son, whose very name is "The Redeemer." The prophets of old stood in their high towers and with straining eyes looked for and longed for His coming. That is what the very word "Advent" means; and during this sacred season we rehearse their vigil, our own eyes fixed on the golden speck of the oncoming Christmas Star. He is coming—our Redeemer—who counts not the cost of the Redemption. Judas Iscariot was to ask cynically, "How much for a God?" And they counted out thirty clinking pieces of silver. If Jesus Christ had been asked by his Heavenly Father, "How much for man? How much will You pay to *redeem* him?" Our Saviour would have answered, "I will give every drop of My Blood." And He did—poured out His Blood like rubies from the Cross. And now through Christ's

redemptive Blood the Sinner receives the price, the grace of true sorrow and purpose of amendment, to buy back his soul from Satan.

Do we still go on treating Christ as though He were worth only thirty pieces of silver—sell-

ing Him and our soul over the counter of sin? We can best answer that by treasuring our soul as it deserves. There is no jewel in any pawn-shop in the world one tenth so precious. A pure soul is the pearl of great price that one day will buy heaven.

A NEW WELCOME

Address delivered on December 12, 1948

Ever since the Holy Family was gathered in the Stable on that bleakest and brightest of all Christmas Days, Christmas has been essentially a family feast. New Year's may be for visiting; but behind the soft curtains and around the cheery fireside, America loves to spend Christmas at home. By this time almost all the world has contributed to making this family celebration the warm and picturesque event that it is. We took jolly old Santa Claus on lend-lease from Holland. We transplanted the gay and glittering Christmas Tree from Germany. We borrowed the stockings hung over the fireplace from France. Ireland lit the Christmas Candles in our windows. England piled the Christmas cards in the postman's bag. The angels over Judea gave us the Christmas carols; and the tiny crib with its colorful statuettes we owe to Italy and St. Francis.

In some parts of the world, like the Virgin Islands and Brazil, Christmas is a bang-bang affair with the accent on fireworks. They welcome Christ at Christ-

mas the way we welcome the Fourth of July. I still think that a flaming poinsettia has it all over a fiery pinwheel. In fact I think that the very best welcome we could give the Newborn King might be to abolish altogether *fireworks in the family*. And we could begin that welcome right now and without any fear of rushing the season, because *this* welcome, this preparation for Christmas is fundamentally an interior preparation of the soul.

By family fireworks I mean episodes like this. Somebody mislays Dad's battered slippers or his odorous pipe or his evening paper, and zoom! he goes up in the air like a skyrocket, exploding in a burst of wrath that fairly drips fire. Christmas may be coming but it is no longer Silent Night. Or, a couple of sisters along the sidelines, who feel that "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men" does not include women, begin to bicker and quarrel, and this word leads to that, and tit for tat, till the whole thing sounds like the spit-spat of a couple of fire-crackers. By way of background obligato, some

families have among them a voice that never would be mistaken for one of the Herald Angels. It is a dusty, discontented voice, and in the way of fireworks resembles most one of those firecrackers that has been broken in the middle like a cigarette, and therefore doesn't go off with an honest little bang but just hisses out. Just so, this big brother doesn't explode. He merely sits there hissing through his teeth, and grumbling "Have we got *that* for supper again?"

Similarly, in these pre-Christmas days you would think that anything like the bark of small fire-arms is hardly the proper welcome for the Prince of Peace. Yet you will find in some homes individuals whose temper works on a hair-trigger mechanism. These are the touchy people. A mere touch—the least fancied offence—and they go off, and the air all around them is blue—and not just smoke either. Of course they will tell you that you must understand them; they really don't mean anything by it. Well, maybe it is only a blank cartridge, but just the same the sudden sharp blast makes everybody nervous if not actually scared. The trouble with these touchy unpredictable people is they have to be labelled like medicine bot-

tles—with directions just how they are to be taken. They are like landing fields: you have to have a weather report before you go in. No wonder Santa Claus sneaks down the chimney and first takes a look around.

Other homes are not content with Christmas candles; they also have Roman Candles. These are the naggers; and a nagger is a person who gives a new meaning to the old adage "There's no place like home!" because when she is on the job there certainly isn't. In the arsenal of family fireworks, the nagger is the Roman Candle because complaints and abuse pour out of her in spurt after spurt of hot flame. And when at last you think it is all over—your mistake! It isn't. Somehow there always seems to be one or more shot left in the Roman Candle, and there *is* one more last word in the nagger.

Then there are families which, left to themselves, might give the New-Born Christ the perfect welcome of a happy and harmonious fire-side. *If left to themselves*—but that is leaving out the in-laws (maybe we should call them outlaws). Sometimes a husband or a wife will have a set of little hidden grievances lined up like a string of firecrackers. But noth-

ing much happens until some meddling in-law comes along and plays the punk. Please do not think I am descending to slang. I am staying very technical, even pyrotechnical if you will. But this rash intruding in-law is very like a piece of punk in that she is all burned up about somebody else's business, proceeds to ignite husband against wife or wife against husband, and then when the snap and crackle of the battle is on, she withdraws, glowing with delight at the fireworks she has started.

Other families, if the Christ-Child chose to come to them at Christmastime, would welcome Him with a Silent Night that was not at all a Holy Night. This situation is very much like a big jumbo firecracker that doesn't go off. You know it has been lit; you fear the fuse is smouldering; but nothing happens. Yet the very silence is dangerous; you are afraid to go too near because it may explode in your very face. In a family, this is the ominous silence of hate. It could be two brothers or two sisters who refuse to speak. But over the whole house hangs that strained silence, that given vacuum, that secretly burning bitterness. This is the worst of all, and who doubts that to this

the Little Christ, were He to hand out His gifts according to deserts, would prefer His Stable, and the company of the gentle beasts and the warm-hearted shepherds?

Well, what is the *answer* to these un-Christmaslike backgrounds for the Christmas Feast? Are you just thinking, "Gee, I wish so-and-so were home listening tonight. Does this fit her!" I am afraid that like an umbrella it may fit any of us. The best answer might be a question. Am I one of these sky-rockets that go up in the air in flaming anger, or one of these touchy little cap-pistols, or an endless Roman Candle nagger who would fight an echo for the last word? Am I? There is nothing like a little humility to make a big change in a home. If the Stable of Bethlehem was a cave, I suppose the Shepherds had to stoop in order to get in. Anyone who wants to come close to Christ has to stoop a little. The proud, whose noses are elevated like an anti-aircraft gun, cannot see their own faults. They cannot see the entrance to the cave either. They stay outside.

Besides, the Holy Family in Bethlehem's bleak Stable was a Family, not just three individuals under the same roof. And a

family—any family—is no place for independence, but rather for interdependence. Its feast is *not* the Fourth of July, but Christmas. A family is no place for these people who are always asserting their rights. "I want my rights! That's all I ask—Justice!" You do—well, just how far do you want Justice? All the way up? Up to the Throne of God? I think most of us would settle for a little mercy there. The family is no place for a dictator who is all temper, nor for a prima-donna who is all temperament. After all, the only fireworks over the Stable was a Star. A star that helped bring others nearer to Our Lord.

On greeting cards they usually paint the Christmas Star as a tiny golden burst of flashing rays, so that at first glance you might mistake it for a Fourth of July sparkler. And that should be the pattern for family fireworks. There will of course always be some domestic misunderstandings, some minor clashes. Where people's lives run so closely side by side, there is bound to be occasional jostling, bumping, stepping on sensitive toes, and occasionally a head-on collision. But if these family tiffs *must* be, let them be like the Fourth of July sparkler; a little

heat, a tiny flare-up, a few sparks, and it is soon over and no harm done.

The point I am trying to make in all this is, that as Christ stands on the threshold of your home ready to come in for Christmas, it is much more important to do your part in the preparation of the family rather than in the mere decoration of the home. Hang your heart with holly, not merely the house. Kind words in the family are better than Christmas candles in the window, which after all give most of their cheer to passers-by. *Emptying* a narrow soul of petty spites and jealousies is much more in the true Christmas spirit than filling a conventional stocking. The family tree comes before the Christmas Tree; and if some of the branches are a bit snarled and tangled, this is the season to straighten them out. Family feuds have spoiled more Christmas dinners than the choicest of foods ever made.

Some people may think that in these pre-Christmas musings I have read you the Gospel of Christmas according to Charles Dickens rather than according to Jesus Christ. But this *is* the Gospel of Christ. I grant it is not the lofty—and vague—spiritual-

ity of the stratosphere. It is more the homespun spirituality of the sidewalk and the stairs and the living-room. It emphasizes the little things that hurt Our Little Lord—like the pricking of the straws, not the piercing of the nails. It concentrates on the home because Charity begins at home. And Charity in that sense never meant a dime clanked into a beggar's cup nor a philanthropic check flourished off for some fund. That word Charity originally meant in English—as it still does in Latin—love. It can of course, and should, express itself in gifts, particularly in the approaching joyous season. But some Christmas gifts are only an external formality, very much like the popcorn and the peppermint canes hung on the Christmas Tree. Real Christmas gifts are like the flowers and fruit of a cherry tree: they spring from

deep within. And the best gifts are those of the heart. Therefore these days when we are smuggling our mysterious bundles into secret hiding places, we should remember that while a year's supply of scented soap may be a very welcome gift, a year's supply of consideration, thoughtfulness, tenderness, charity will be more welcome still. A year's subscription to this magazine or that may be ideal, but a year's subscription to life as lived by a kindly, considerate loving member of the family would be appreciated even more!

It is all for the sake of the Little Stranger in the Manger. It is a new kind of Christmas welcome—a true one. Because between the inner peace of your conscience washed sweet and clean, and the outer peace of love for those around you, the true spirit of Christmas swings and rings like a merry bell.

A NEW CHILD

Address delivered on December 19, 1948

This Child was not only new. He was news! Only, instead of news-boys shouting it on the street corners, angels sang it in the skies. It was the front page of the Gospel—and that word “Gospel,” if you break it in half, “Good-Spel”—is the sturdy old Saxon way of saying “Good News.” His Birthday was the best news, the greatest headline of history. But when the story broke, like most “Extra’s” it took the town completely by surprise.

Early that evening there was plenty of stir and bustle in sleepy little Bethlehem. This was the eve of the big census, so the narrow streets never throbbed with so much excitement. It was like a family reunion. In the cottages, housewives were humming happily as they flung the best spread over the best bed, because that rich relative from Jerusalem was due any minute now. In the inn, the smug proprietor was rubbing his oily hands and bowing distinguished guests to their special quarters. In the census booths, the clerks smoothed out the longest parch-

ments, ready for the largest registration ever. Oh, there was plenty of eager preparation all around! Too bad they were preparing for everything but the one thing that mattered, the one thing that was to outlive that night and put Bethlehem with a star on the map of the world. Everybody was expecting somebody. Nobody was expecting Christ. Little wonder a gulp comes into your throat when you hear that Gospel line: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

“But why must this same blunder happen every Christmas? *This Christmas?* Why must some of us go on making Bethlehem’s mistake all over again? There they were all business at the census booths, and all pleasure at the inn, so the Great Event went over their heads like a Star. But nowadays too, don’t we have a Christmas which in some quarters is too commercial, in other quarters too convivial, and in both the Little Christ left shivering out in the cold? For some people “Silent Night, Holy Night,” still rings

out loudest on the tinkling xylophone of the cash-register while the Birth of the Savior rings up an unresponsive "No sale!"

There are other people who will spend Christmas with the innkeeper. Like Uncle Egg-Nog who is already dreaming of a "tight" Christmas; whose "many happy returns" will be hiccups; and who, filled with Christmas spirits, may well wind up under the tree. True, Christmas is a Feast, and therefore calls for celebration, but not for dissipation, not for sodden drunkenness, and not—incidentally—for the indecent excesses of some pre-Christmas parties in otherwise staid offices. What a weird way to welcome the coming of the Son of God! Isn't this about like crucifying Christ on a Christmas tree, and crowning Him with a sharp-edged holly wreath?

No wonder then that the first Christmas went walking with saddened heart past the inn, and went on to the shepherds. A little group of God-fearing men, humble and wholesome, they stood on that midnight hill, leaning drowsily on their staffs, drawing their cloaks closer about them against the tingling night-air. A dull, routine job. Every night a carbon copy of the night before. You looked down

and saw the purple slope of the hill; you looked around and saw the white blotches of dozing sheep; you looked up and saw the far-off silver pattern of the stars. This was the last outpost of obscurity. Nothing ever happened here. Nothing could happen—when suddenly all around them a thousand stars seem to melt into one glittering brightness! The frosty air quivers with glorious music. The voice of an Archangel trumpets forth: "Fear not! I bring you good tidings of great joy! For this day is born to you a Saviour!" The next moment, when the angels have wheeled away, and when all that beauty has passed like the turning of a page, the stunned shepherds stare into one another's eyes, grip one another by the arm, and whisper, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this wonder that the Lord hath made!"

So they go over to Bethlehem, and come clumping into the shadowy stable. That lantern swinging from a rafter is a dim, misty affair after the dazzling glory of the miraculous skies. But they grope their way through the half-gloom, and the next moment they see—they see what a hundred gaudy holy pictures and a thousand artificial

cribs have made us take for granted, have robbed of its freshness and wonder, have dulled and deadened the impact of a scene that should make us draw a quick breath of astonishment and awe! They see, in the last place in the world you would expect to find it, stirring feebly in the straw of a cattle-crib, bundled in soft swaddling clothes, a Baby! On one side a radiant young Mother bends over the manger, in her eyes a light like diamonds, but on her cheek a tear, as though love and adoration and joy had filled up her very spirit and now are overflowing from her eyes. On the other side St. Joseph stands as though he felt a little in the way, and somewhat bewildered. When an impulse comes to take the Infant up in his arms, another impulse tells him he should rather get down on his knees. *Because this Child is God!*

Now Mary notices her visitors, herdsmen who had left their flocks and come running to the Lamb of God. With a graceful gesture, the Maiden Mother lifts the infant up and turns toward them. It is the first Benediction. Sticks of golden straw still cling to the white swaddling clothes like the golden rays of a mon-
strance, and the frosty breath of

the huge ox floats up like clouds of incense. And in the straw, seraphs and shepherds, the holiest and the lowliest, kneel together.

Of all the impressive places where the Little Christ could have been cradled, He chose this! This place and these people! Not Rome with its imperial pomp and its helmeted legions, not Athens with its fine-spun philosophies and its marble art, not Alexandria with its noisy harbor and its haggling bazaars, but this! A little manger in an abandoned stable on the outskirts of an obscure town, in the remote province of a pocket-handkerchief kingdom! The poorest shepherd there did not have a humbler birth. And the next morning He was just another Name on the census list . . . just another Boy. You have often heard how Abraham Lincoln, who was born in a log cabin, said "God must love the common people. He made so many of them." On Christmas morning we gaze at our Blessed Lord born in a stable, and we murmur, "Yes, He must have loved them. Because He became one of them Himself."

That is why Christmas will always be the Feast of the common man, the festival of God's esteem for the obscure, ordinary

little people. So if nobody pays much attention to you, if there is no room for you in the inn with the important ones, if you are just another name on the census list, just another undistinguished nobody—then Christmas is especially *your* day. It is still the day when Christ with the neat irony of God goes past the proud Herods, and the overlearned Pharisees, and the carousing revellers, and is born again among the modern shepherds—the ordinary simple people, the humble of heart, the wholesome of life, the quietly and sincerely devout.

When the Almighty took that star and streaked it like a piece of golden chalk down the blackboard of the midnight sky, and pointed to the Child in the Crib, He was teaching such people the lesson of every Christmas to come. Things would change of course. Things have changed. This Christmas the heavens do not echo the carols of shining spirits; instead, thanks to the radio, the heavens will ring with the carols of men. The wings of archangels do not beat rhythmically over Judean Hills as they call out the first Christmas greetings; instead the outspread wings of the air-mail will coast across the sky, carrying sacks of Christmas cards. Shepherds

will not stand ankle-deep in the straw of a stable, but chauffeurs and engineers and nurses and housewives will kneel in orderly pews. You see, everything has changed—the only thing left of the original Christmas is Christ.

And Christ is not a thing. He is a Person! So the bright beam of the Christmas Star must focus on that one person, not on many things. Don't spend too much time wondering whether those slippers you are sending Aunt Harriet are quite big enough—or are they too big, and will she feel insulted? Or worrying whether Grandma will really care for that pink bed-jacket, or will she perhaps promptly exchange it for an album of boogie-woogie? Or pondering just what toys you can give to Junior which will delight him and at the same time not disturb you. Trouble with this sort of thing is that they are only *things*, and the Little Christ Child somehow gets lost in the red ribbons and the crinkly holiday wrappings. After all it is *His* Birthday, isn't it? Give Him a thought! Give Him your chief thought! Wouldn't the Shepherds have been amazed if someone had suggested that they turn their backs on the Crib, bow courteously to one another,

and give each other gifts—say, a pair of sandals or a scarf? Wouldn't they have said, "But what about Him? *This is His day!*"

It is still His Day. At least when we give our presents, we give them in His name, in His spirit. Then we shall not be tying up perfume or gloves or neckties or fountain pens, but tenderness, thoughtfulness, love. And

gratitude—gratitude to the God Who became one of us. Gratitude for humanity's most thrilling hour, the highest compliment mankind ever received. The cynic talks about resigning from the human race, and the Almighty elects to join it! *This is Christmas!* (The rest is mostly crepe paper.) He lies there in the Little Crib, and there I lay my heart.

A NEW RESOLVE

Address delivered on December 26, 1948

Christmas is just over, but somehow it seems a long time ago. Looking back now, doesn't it strike you that like most things human, the joy was mostly in the anticipation? Once the day itself dawns, once the flower is plucked, it begins to fade and die. And now everything is over but the cleaning up. Mother is murmuring to herself, "This house looks a perfect fright!" But really, Mother, it is a picturesque little earthquake, and presents a state of charming disarray with the floor littered with open gift boxes and bright red ribbon and greeting cards and toys. Toys . . . Watch your step, Dad, because one careless stride and your foot will be on a tiny fire-engine, and the next moment your two feet may be in mid-air, and you'll have a touch of black and blue added to the usual Christmas colors of red and green. But you can smile a little grimly yourself that the youngsters have not gotten off entirely unscarred either. The situation is reversed from this time Christmas Eve. Now the candy boxes are empty and the youngsters full;

only the boxes still look fairly comfortable. But perhaps you yourself are just a bit drowsy. And the thought comes to you with a shudder that tomorrow morning the icy jingle of that alarm clock will splinter your dreams and wake you to the horrible reality that work is beginning all over again.

You will not like it; but you will go. Because you realize what would happen if you quit. So there's no need to talk about that. But, if we can do it without much grinding of gears, I would like to shift to the subject of people who quit in a more important and even tragic sphere. I mean people who quit on the one job the Almighty had in mind when He sent us here on earth; the job where no one must shirk and from which no one must transfer; the job where there are no executives and no minor employees. The job of saving one's soul. The job not of earning a good living, but of living a good life.

And today—even today—somebody, somewhere is going to quit. Today after weeks and months

and maybe years of trying, somebody is going to give up. Today somebody is going to scream, at least mentally, "I can't hold on any longer!"—lose his grip and fall—maybe into sin, maybe into despair, maybe into hell.

You are thinking to yourself, "These are strange thoughts, and we still gathered round the Christmas Crib." I know, but look past the Crib a little, just toward the horizon of next week. I see tall blue shadows showing across the desert. I hear the silvery tinkle of shaking bells as the camels come loping on. I realize the Crib is not yet complete. But in a few days, on the Feast of Little Christmas, our feast of the Epiphany, three new figures, come from afar, will kneel in the straw. This is the feast that shouts down the valleys of time like a thousand trumpets, "Never quit!" Because it is the Feast of three strangers who kept following the Star till they came to Christ!

They say a word to the wise is sufficient. This is a word *from* the wise, from Three Wise Men to any of us who may be tempted to be foolish and quit. They tell you their journey wasn't easy, but it was worth it. Over mountains they came, and

through deserts, and across rivers, and past cities, always following the Star. Some people smiled at them, and some sneered. Some shook their heads in amazement. Some held their sides in laughter. Some winked, and some asked sarcastic questions. What did it matter to the Wise Men? Because beyond this mockery and those mountains, beyond the sneers and the sands, they saw the Star! And they never stopped till the Star stopped and hung like a lamp over the Cradle of God. Tradition has baptized them with musical Oriental names, but never mind the names. Call them what they proved themselves to be: the Patron Saints of Perseverance!

Perseverance itself is likely to be a vague, fuzzy Fifth Avenue sort of word for a commonplace, kitchen kind of idea: "Don't quit!" I know that it is very easy to say. And I certainly am not trying to tell you it is easy to do. As a matter of fact that very word "perseverance" implies just the opposite. Originally it was a wedding of two Latin words: *per*, meaning through; and *severa*, meaning hard. So perseverance literally means "through hard things"—because that is when you need perseverance—when the weakling whim-

pers and the quitter quits—when the going gets rough. You don't persevere through a delicious Christmas dinner or a Florida vacation. The only time you can really talk about persevering is when the urge to quit is overwhelming—and you don't.

This rugged old world is so full of hard things that no worthwhile goal is ever reached without perseverance, without throttling that temptation to give it all up, without an iron resolution that must go on and on like an endless iron chain. It is that way even in the material world. In any honest success story the first dozen chapters are up-hill, and without benefit of ski-tow or escalator. When Benjamin Disraeli rose to make his first speech in the House of Commons, his voice squeaked like a tin whistle, and his ridiculously big words flapped round his sentences like overlong sleeves. Everybody started to laugh. There were rude cries, "Sit down!" Disraeli stood there for one moment, silent. There may not have been any thunder in his voice, but lightning flashed from his eyes. He raised his arms and in the strange quiet he all but whispered. "I will sit down—now. But I promise you that the day will come when you will rush

to hear me. You will rush!" And they did. Not only that. Disraeli, the young dude in the canary-colored jacket, had determined that one day he would become Prime Minister. And he did. Grant that he had talent, grant he had industry, but behind both lay the driving dynamo of perseverance!

Perhaps there were other factors, like luck and influence. Perhaps in the present jangling commercial world in which you live a great many doors to success are marked "Pull"—and the right "pull" will get you in. But I am not talking about that. I am assuring you that the Gate of Heaven is marked only "Push," and only push, determination, resolution will get you in. Nobody is the brother-in-law of God.

Hell, on the other hand, they say is paved with good intentions. No! It is paved with intentions that were not quite good enough; intentions that never developed the muscles of resolutions. Some people think they make a resolution. They only make a wish. When they close the door against sin, it is like a swinging door that flies open at the first touch of the next temptation. Other people compromise with sin: "I'll do it just this one

last time, and then no more." The door *they* close is a revolving door, and the first thing they know the same old sin is around again. A real *resolution* is like the door that is slammed and bolted and barred.

We are approaching the season when cartoonists go to their dusty files for the musty jokes on resolutions. "Let me see — Newlywed's Biscuits — ah, here — New Year's Resolutions." And the less talented comedians will hurl the old custard-pie sentences at the equally ancient target. Never mind. "I firmly resolve" still has the power to take a sinner and make him a saint. Of course the resolution may have to be renewed. It is like that fantasy in the Sunday Supplements about cruising to the moon in a rocket-ship. The idea seems to be that when one rocket-motor is just on the point of dying out, it automatically starts another, and so on. I don't know whether that will ever get us to the moon. But I do know that the power and drive of renewed and repeated resolutions will get us to heaven. And in a very literal sense God will give the quitter hell.

It isn't that God expects us to reach great heights of virtue. But we won't reach anywhere unless we keep trying. I always

liked that story about the traveller whom the monks of St. Bernard found on a snowy Alpine slope—frozen in death, his face toward the summit, and his knee bent as though about to take one more step. And as they carried him to his grave, one of the monks unconsciously preached his eulogy. "He never got to the top. But he never quit. He died *climbing!*"

So, don't quit! You worn little mother, with your worn little beads, keep praying for that boy who has turned his back on God. Some day he will turn and stretch out his hands for help, and the loop of your beads will catch him like a lifeline—perhaps even after you are gone!

And you, whose marriage has proved a sad disillusionment, and who are nervously thinking of a divorce—don't quit! Your wedding ring has not been all sweetness like a coffee-ring, nor all fun like a circus ring; but it is not a loose-leaf ring either, to be snapped open and one partner rejected and another inserted. The little two-paged book, the contract, is *bound* by the *bonds* of matrimony. Your consolation and encouragement is that your page is clean, and God understands and He will reward!

And you, young man, who

sometimes kneel in the shadowy church uneasy and ashamed, half-afraid to raise your eyes to the white altar, feeling that vile sin has tramped its muddy boots over the altar of your soul—do you think there is any stain so black or so deep that the Blood of God cannot wash it away? Don't quit! Yesterday a fellow just like you quit. He doesn't know it yet, but as of yesterday and into eternity, he is the saddest kind of fool, a damned fool. You, be wise! Follow the Star, and it will lead you *out of* the stable!

And you, young girl, who sometimes wonder whether in this smart, shallow, wisecracking

world it really pays to be good; in this cheap new edition of the old paganism, where petting is considered petty, where the chaste are seldom chased after, and where purity is a quality looked for in soap or oleomargarine—no matter—you still are right, and they are wrong, and in their hearts they know it! Stay up there, a shining unsmirched star and one day you will brighten the life of the man that deserves you!

So for us all, each in his own rugged spot, *a new resolve*, and then what we can only wish to one another, God in His Goodness will really give:

A Happy New Year!

THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC HOUR

(Extract from the address of the late Patrick Cardinal Hayes at the inaugural program of the Catholic Hour in the studio of the National Broadcasting Company, New York City, March 2, 1930.)

Our congratulations and our gratitude are extended to the National Council of Catholic Men and its officials, and to all who, by their financial support, have made it possible to use this offer of the National Broadcasting Company. The heavy expense of managing and financing a weekly program, its musical numbers, its speakers, the subsequent answering of inquiries, must be met. . . .

This radio hour is for all the people of the United States. To our fellow-citizens, in this word of dedication, we wish to express a cordial greeting and, indeed, congratulations. For this radio hour is one of service to America, which certainly will listen in interestedly, and even sympathetically, I am sure, to the voice of the ancient Church with its historic background of all the centuries of the Christian era, and with its own notable contribution to the discovery, exploration, foundation and growth of our glorious country. . . .

Thus to voice before a vast public the Catholic Church is no light task. Our prayers will be with those who have that task in hand. We feel certain that it will have both the good will and the good wishes of the great majority of our countrymen. Surely, there is no true lover of our Country who does not eagerly hope for a less worldly, a less material, and a more spiritual standard among our people.

With good will, with kindness and with Christ-like sympathy for all, this work is inaugurated. So may it continue. So may it be fulfilled. This word of dedication voices, therefore, the hope that this radio hour may serve to make known, to explain with the charity of Christ, our faith, which we love even as we love Christ Himself. May it serve to make better understood that faith as it really is—a light revealing the pathway to heaven: a strength, and a power divine through Christ; pardoning our sins, elevating, consecrating our common every-day duties and joys, bringing not only justice but gladness and peace to our searching and questioning hearts.

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