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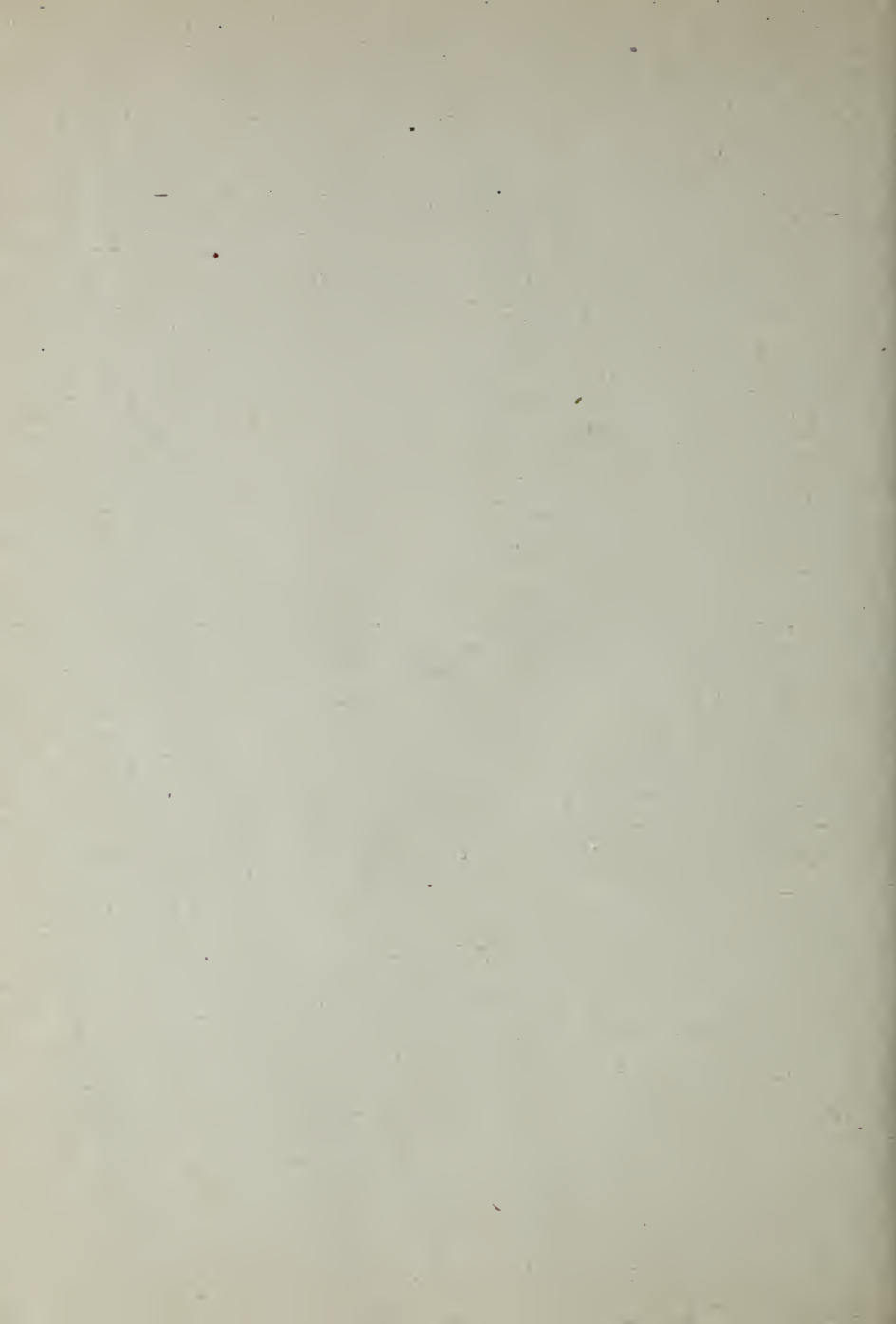
ACCORDING TO THE HOLY GOSPEL



The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field.

Rev. John J. Reilly
The Hour of Faith

According To The Holy Gospel



According To The Holy Gospel

A series of Sunday morning talks given in 1946 on "The Hour of Faith," a coast-to-coast religious broadcast produced by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the American Broadcasting Company.

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Calm Yourself	7
A Little Bit of Good and A Little Bit of Bad	11
Last But Not Least	15
Listening In	19
No Detour Here	23

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CALM YOURSELF

Talk given on February 3, 1946

The ability of Our Blessed Lord to render all things calm, so ably demonstrated in the Gospel read today in all Catholic churches, has long been recognized, and yet like those of His Disciples the human heart stands in need of constant reassurance. Perhaps never more so than during these days when the whole world is rocking like a boat, should we be convinced that the steadying influence of Our Lord is always near, that the Dear Scarred Hand of Christ is always on our shoulder. The ability of Christ to make us calm, even in tempestuous times like these, can never be denied, even though at times our hearts are not too calm. The world can make us calm but the calm that Christ produced and the calm this world can give, rest upon two very different foundations. The calm that this world gives rests upon external things that are always shifting. It depends upon certain conditions, which are not conditions of the soul, but conditions of environment and possessions. Christ was really sleeping in that boat,

sleeping like a babe, His soul at ease, and though the elements might lash like fury, His peace was from within and not dependent on exterior circumstances. I, too, can be calm in the world's meaning of the word, if all is right with the world and I have all that I desire—health, wealth, and friends. I can be calm as long as these are with me and as long as I am able to enjoy them; but if these are taken from me, or if I am no longer to appreciate the same and to register their delights, gone is my calm, gone then is my peace, gone my short-lived calm, unlike that of Christ, dependent as it was upon exterior conditions.

Of all the sentiments prevailing in this great land of ours during the last few years the most pronounced perhaps was that of patriotism. Patriotism was catching, spreading, like a vast and far-flung epidemic. The little we had affected others; they in turn reacted on ourselves—until throughout the length and breadth of this nation hearts inflamed with love of

country clamored for a chance to translate their feeling into action. Now this patriotic state of mind has been superseded by bewilderment. We feel like creatures tossed about by destiny; we feel like children being pushed toward some abyss. Religious-minded people may not be the calmest people in a war-scarred world, but surely religious-minded people should not suffer from the added pain of bewilderment. We know God keeps us in the dark in time of war. Well, the light does not always burn more brightly in time of peace. We know that we are often in the dark. We should know the darkness is a temporary state. We know, besides, there is a light and that the light is not as far away as the darkness may be intimating. God often keeps us in the dark that we may more securely slip our hand in His and live by faith in Him and in His Providence.

The darkness is not total either. We are not in the dark as to who makes war. God does not make war. Men make war, and men start making war the moment they forget His precepts. There is a bit of a rebellion going on in the heart of every man who commits a mortal

sin. Men have been falling into war with their parachutes of self-indulgence since the first man fell from the state of grace and original justice. There is no deep, dark, secret to all of this, but the real jet-black darkness that does envelope us is the question as to why God lets men go on like this. And this may forever be a mystery to us all until that day dawns when faith is no longer that by which we live. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter," Christ said (*John 13:7*). From this we ought to know God loves to keep us in the dark, and yet the darkness is not total or else our eyes soon grow accustomed to the dark and with the eye of faith we make out figures, we make out shapes. Here and there the hand of God is most apparent. Here and there we see enough to know at least there is a hand, and so we know, too, there must be a heart.

We are like children, really, here on earth, conscious only of our immediate surroundings. We are like children at parades, crushed and stifled. We see alone the objects that brush us by. But let a loving Father take us in His arms and hold us aloft that we may see through the

eyes of faith, what a difference this makes in our view-point. We are in a crowd, with the narrowest of views, sometimes with the narrowest of interests. We see the trunks but not the tree-tops. We see the force unloosed—we do not always see the results those forces have; but should a loving Father deign to raise us to the level of His own point of view and bid us look at life through faith, what a change would then come over us. In all things I would see His will if not His pleasure. In all things I would see the master stroke of God. In a deadly contest that involved my country's honor my patriotism would run high. Too violent regret for what appear to be reverses, too vehement anxiety as to the final issues, would be held in check. Faith puts me in the arms of God and there I feel God's steadying influence. So, too, in our personal trials, in our domestic difficulties, in our own Gethsemane, in our own Cross-carrying on busy streets, ours should be the habit of looking up into the face of God to see His meaning there, and when there appears to be no meaning, to learn to bow our head and kiss His hand, for so it hath seemed good to Him in His

sight. The Creator does not ask the creature too much when He asks him to live in the half-light of faith; rather, it is a mark of marvelous condescension that the Creator asks us to join our wills with His in shaping things which He knew from the beginning.

Thus we shall be calm. At any rate, bewilderment will have no place in our hearts. Hard though it may be, "Thy will be done" should be our constant prayer. This may be painful. This may be costly, but pain and cost only make our love more dear. God puts above all else the faith we show when in the dark we cannot see His hand, when in the dark we cannot see His face, when in the dark we do not even understand, when in the dark we join our wills with His.

The reward for such a life of faith, and for the conviction that the Dear Scarred Hand of Christ is always on our shoulder, is exceedingly great, both here and in the life to come. While here, it frees us from bewilderment, it makes us calm. We have placed our hopes for peace in human hands, and look where they have led us. In the hands of God the things that are for our peace are much more safe.

Our life of faith on earth is but a prelude to the life of light hereafter, when we shall kneel near God and look back on our past. Then He will trace for us in the brightness and in the shadows those things we never knew were for our peace.

Then we shall see how wars began, then we shall see how peace was made, then we shall see the part we played in God's design—the thoughts, the words that passed so quickly by, but had a bearing on our eternity.

Then we shall see the times we clung to God when in the dark. Then we shall have calm, for we shall hear the echo of our faithfulness, the prayer that reassured our God, the prayer that made it known we were His children, the prayer that bore us up in life and won for us an ever-

lasting crown, the prayer: 'God, Your holy will be always done.'

When we accept God's will, all else matters little, our souls take on the calm of Christ. Why ever oppose God's will; a good *little* man never triumphs over a good *big* force. The heart of all humanity profoundly yearns for peace these days, for the equilibrium of all humanity has been upset by exterior conditions. The world would pay any price for peace. The calm of Christ is not a costly thing, it comes to us at bargain price, that paltry price of yielding to His will. Ours shall be that peace, ours shall be the calm that reigned in the heart of the sleeping Christ, sleeping like a baby on the sea of Galilee, if we shall only slip our hand in His and say to Him: Oh, Christ lead Thou me on.

A LITTLE BIT OF GOOD AND A LITTLE BIT OF BAD

Talk given on February 10, 1946

The picture of the garden painted in the parable read this morning in all Catholic churches, provides us with a parallel condition existing in every human heart. There was good seed, there was bad seed in the garden of which the Gospel speaks; and there is good and bad in every human heart. The Gospel, too, explains how these conditions were brought about. While the good man was asleep his enemies came and upset his garden. From this we should be justified in feeling that if the good man had no enemies and had not slept, his garden would have kept on being beautiful and productive. Like conditions may exist for the human heart. The human heart has enemies and the human heart is not always on the alert. There were bad tendencies sown in our hearts before we ever knew we had a heart—the sad result of original sin. Time and time again the enemy of God and man has been active in our regard, and in moments of distraction our hearts have been invaded. There is good and bad in the hearts of

others. Remember, there is good and bad in our hearts too.

The remarkable feature of the Gospel of today is that when the good man heard about his garden he did not get excited. He made a mental note of what had happened. He did not blame the soil; he did not blame the manner of the planting. He did not lay the blame where the blame should not have been laid. His mind went quickly to the root of all his troubles—"an enemy hath done this." From then on, however, he took the necessary steps to undo the damage that had been done. So it is with our poor hearts. So it is with the hearts of others. A more nearly ideal situation is to be preferred, but why spend time thinking of the ideal? We must face the inevitable and take steps toward handling the situation as it is. The good and bad will be there in our hearts until some far off day's harvest, but if the good remains it will be because the good has triumphed through our efforts; for though weeds grow of themselves, flowers need cultivation. So, too, the

good in our hearts needs cultivation; the bad somehow thrives with no attention on our part, in fact, the bad thrives through our neglect.

Faced with this condition—that is, that there is a little bit of good and a little bit of bad in every heart—what are we to do? Faced with this condition—that there is good and there is bad in the hearts of others—we must remember there is good and bad in our own hearts too. And so we must be tolerant of other's hearts, not of the bad, but of the hearts, tolerant with the tolerance of Christ. Faced with the condition that there is good and bad in our own hearts, our lives should take on the nature of a constant struggle to nourish all the good in us and so render the evil in us more and more insignificant; and as soon as we have been convinced that this is done through our own effort, assisted by our God who hates all evil, or done by God but with our cooperation, who should hate evil, done not by complacency or drifting with the tide, but rather by stirring action within ourselves, we shall have arrived spiritually. When the good man in the Gospel found his field had been disturbed he said, "Rather

let the bad seed stay there till I catch up with it on a later day"; and in between times he bent his back, or did whatever gardeners are supposed to do, lest the good get bad and the bad got worse. There must be a considerable amount of back-bending on our part if our lives are to bring forth the fruit that they were meant to bring forth.

The right approach to this spiritual problem in our lives is indirect. The first thing necessary is the isolation of our predominant fault, and we must never make the mistake of wrestling with the wrong enemy. Our leading fault might not be the one we find ourselves obliged frequently to confess or admit. Our leading fault may be something skulking in the background of our hearts and never seeing the light of day. Impurity may not be our leading fault at all, but rather sloth or love of ease or love of pleasure or selfishness or pride. Our uncharitable tongues may not be the instruments of our leading faults, but rather jealousy or envy. To keep the bad in all of us from taking beach-heads we must by self analysis determine what is the bad within us and then lay down our strategy. And the strategy

for victory lies not in concentrating on the evil in our hearts, but rather on the corresponding virtue. There is good and bad in all our hearts, but the good can triumph over the bad. My resolutions should not be just a question of avoiding this or that—they should be a question of developing the opposite. Did you notice how, in the war, when an attack was stalled or bogged down, they went around their objective or above it or beneath it and, as they say, “mopped” up what was in between.

By concentrating on its opposite virtue, sin is slowly eliminated from our hearts. By concentrating on the good in all of us the bad folds up and wilts. We should not measure our past by the record of our faults, but rather by the series of our successes, however small. The gardener who spends all day digging weeds and never giving a thought to the strengthening of his plants will produce a tidy but depressing garden, and he won't have a bumper crop. He would hurt his back by stooping and he would miss the beauty of his garden from seldom standing upright; and, of course, incidentally, he would miss the beauty of the stars. Every

gardener ought to know that if he does his best by the flowers, they will derive such good from the soil that there will be so much less for the nourishment of weeds. Weeding must be done; but his first care should be for the flowers. We must root out vice in all its forms from our hearts, but the virtues should get our first attention. Every energy of my soul should first be spent upon encouraging my poor feeble virtues to grow strong. There is good and bad in all our hearts, but by their very strength our virtues will eliminate our sins. My spiritual activity should not take the form of avoiding this or avoiding that but rather doing this or doing that. If I indulge too much in anything I shall not resolve to indulge less, I shall resolve to be more chaste, to be more temperate, to be more mortified, to be more like Christ.

Our hearts are just so big and not much bigger. By developing the good in us and by the expansion of our virtues the bad is overcrowded—and even weeds need space to grow. We shall always be uncharitable unless we have taken steps to think kindly of another. We shall always be a prey to jealousy unless we

have taken steps to perfect our humility. We shall always be a prey to the assaults of the impure unless we have encouraged in our hearts so great a love for purity that foul thoughts are so much wasted efforts on us, and foul conversations bore us to death.

There is supreme consolation in the thought that in this struggle for supremacy within our hearts, in this rivalry for victory, we are not alone. We have Christ. We have His Mother with her human touch. Christ knows all there is to know about gardens. In a garden Christ once reached the all-time low in suffering. In a garden Christ once reached the all-time high in resolution to overcome the evil of this world.

"Suffer them both to grow

until the harvest," was the good man's resolution in the Gospel. Until Christ comes to gather in the harvest of immortal souls, be patient with conditions.

The struggle will go on, but unlike other struggles, the outcome is assured. Men have fought for lesser things and felt repaid. Men feel repaid when they have won a lasting peace, and a lasting peace with men is only temporary. Men will lay their bleeding bodies on altars that other men have made, in their hopes for peace that other men can take away. We are being asked to take our hearts and place them as a bleeding sacrifice before the living God and thus insure for us, not so much a lasting as an ever-lasting peace, a peace no man, nor even God, will ever take away.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Talk given on February 17, 1946

Time and time again throughout His life, Our Blessed Lord stressed the dignity and importance of the individual, and never for a moment, though conscious of His mission to redeem the entire human race, did He lose sight of men as individuals. The first and last, the last and first, were people of importance in the eyes of Christ. At the last Supper, though He had all the Twelve in mind, He was concentrating with His love on Judas. The story of the ninety-nine and one sheep has ever been a source of fascination to us all. Even in His bitter agony on the Cross, with all the world in full view before Him, He took time out to turn His head and address one repentant thief. Under the influence of this same consideration that Our Lord gave individuals, later on Saint Peter, who perhaps was the most global-minded of all the Apostles, wrote to warn his converts that each one of them had a grace, each one of them had a mighty role in the great big plan of God.

There has been a tendency of late to minimize the individual

and glorify the mass. When working-men are mentioned nowadays they are often called Labor. Our gallant men and women who fought our battles for us are referred to as the Armed Forces, they are not always thought of as individuals of flesh and blood. They do many things these days in the name of society or the community. There is too much talk of the common good these days and not enough of the individual good. This can lead to much oppression, for instead of seeing Christ in the poor and in the working-man, the poor are relegated to the class of underprivileged and working men are mentioned in terms of working hours. One school of economics says that individuals have no rights at all except in so far as they are a part of the social whole, and the individual has a right only to that which is good for the whole. One can see how this can become a splendid basis for social tyranny, for if society thinks that for society's good a man should be underpaid, society thus provides itself with an

excellent argument for the sweatshop. Every time the fallen dictators arose to speak they glorified the mass and minimized the individual. Yet any attempt to exalt the community at the expense of the God-given rights of the individual is a step in the wrong direction, and totally disregards the way Our Blessed Lord was wont to look at this matter. Each one of us has an immortal soul. Society has no immortal soul. Each one of you has a special grace; each one of you makes up a little circle, yourself and God. Bethlehem should have filled us with a sense of our own importance. Each one of us has a purpose here in life, a plan marked out from all eternity; and membership in any society, even in God's great mystical society, does not destroy our individuality. On Judgment Day we will stand alone before our God, all artificial groupings will have disappeared. We will not even stand before our God as Americans, though we may be asked to account for those gifts which America has made possible.

Religious-minded men and women should keep in mind the value of their own individual souls. Society may fall in ruins

around us but the individual must be saved. Of course society will be much better if individual dignity is recognized, for to belittle the individual is to belittle the society that individuals make up. The danger that confronts us all when we lose sight of our identity is that we lose initiative. Each one of us has a grace. Whether we are first or last, each one of us has a grace that is increased directly only by ourselves and God. We are helped by others only indirectly. Their prayers help us only indirectly. We know, of course, the value of organization; we know the strength of organization; that is why religion is so well organized. But society at its best is but the sum of individuals, and the dignity of the group or the church is increased when the dignity of the individual is increased or at least given some consideration. We fulfill our obligation to our God as the head of society, only when we worship God in a group as we do when we attend church; but don't forget, it was a particular creative act on the part of God that put each of us into being. It was a particular act of love, a particular passion, a particular pain of which each of

us was made the object, as if no one else existed. You and I are particular, definite souls in the mind of God and this world wouldn't be the world that it was meant to be if either you or I were not here. Each one of us has a grace, each one of us has a ministry, each one of us God has picked to watch over a particular portion of His vineyard. No one else has my background, no one else has my hobbies, my tastes, my pleasures. In a certain sense I am unique. I can make a definite contribution to my God which He can get from no one else. There may be times when, in all humility, I can say: What is it that God can get from me that He can get from no one else? It may be just myself that I and no one else can give, and God wants me. No wonder then, that we are people of importance in the eyes of God, however unimportant we may be in the eyes of men. I may be last or I may be first, but this does not necessarily mean I am the least.

Men are right then when they say they are different. They may be wrong though when they say that they are better. If the Incarnation and the Redemption sufficed for every man but one, Christ would have done it all

over again—for the Incarnation and Redemption were for man, and every man at that, and this is a tremendous thought. If there is something in us all that has caught the divine fancy; if there is something in us all that can be lifted up by grace to the dizzy heights of participation in divine life, then that something should be worthy of our attention and our highest possible regard and reverence. Society in a certain sense is no greater than we are, for society in a certain sense depends on us. I must then be fully conscious of my individual worth. I can never value others until I have become conscious of my own dignity, and the more I esteem my own dignity and my relationship with God the more I shall esteem the dignity of my fellowman. Once I have perceived my own importance in the eyes of God, then I can perceive the importance of others in the sight of God. Once convinced I should do something about saving my own soul, then the desire should take the form of making a contribution toward the salvation of other souls.

The very basis of a religious life, the very beginning of every attempt to achieve anything outside myself, should rest upon the

solid conviction that my own being is of value, that I have a high call, a high destiny, that there is a divinity within me, a little spark of God, and though there may be a million other sparks, this world will never be as bright as the world was meant to be if my little spark is not doing what little sparks are meant to do. You can see, of course, what manner of society we would have if we, who make up society, lived with this in mind.

Christ had all the sinners in His mind when He looked at Judas, but no two sinners are alike. There has never been a sinner quite like Judas. Christ had all the saints in mind when

He looked at John, but no two saints are alike. There has never been a saint quite like John. Christ had all the mothers in His mind when He looked at His own sweet mother, Mary, but no two mothers are alike. There has never been a mother quite like Mary.

Each one of us has a special grace, each one of us has a destiny. In our lives, then, we must retain our individuality, keep conscious of our worth in this as in no other thing, be ourselves and nobody else. The state, society, the group, the mass, they exist for you and me—and we, of course—why you and I exist for God.

LISTENING IN

Talk given on February 24, 1946

Not much more beauty and very little more accuracy can be found in any parable of Our Lord, than is found in the parable in the Gospel that was read this morning in all Catholic churches. It is outdone in beauty and in accuracy only by its timelessness, for the astounding truths which the parable contains are as appropriate today as they were at the time that they were uttered. Our Lord revealed the artist in His make-up when, to describe the effect of the word of God upon His listener's hearts, He took the figure of the sower and the seed. The visual education of today, the power of the moving picture, could be no more instrumental in driving home a truth than the living word of Christ, painting a picture with which everyone was familiar. The soil, the rocks, the thorns, the wayside path in Palestine were the tints, the shades He used to produce His picture. They are the most soil-conscious people in the world, perhaps—these people of Palestine. Their livelihood depends entirely upon the soil, and the

wear a head-dress to protect them from the wind-blown soil. The soil is rocky and barren. They wear a head-dress to protect them from the wind-blown soil. Vegetation stops as abruptly as a curbstone and the wayside is a beaten path of hard, dry soil, flattened by the ceaseless passing of feet—animal and human. To describe the waste of the word of God on the mind of man, and to depict its fruitlessness by comparing it with seed falling on such soil, was such a master-touch on the part of Christ that one might be prompted to read the Gospel and say, "Isn't it the truth?" and let it go at that, for human eloquence can only mar the effect produced by Christ.

It is the timelessness of Christ's remarks, however, that strike us all today, for they are just as true of modern conditions as they were then, and we imagine Christ had a wistful look in His beautiful eyes as He gave voice to them, for He knew they would be true of all the to-morrows—the fearful waste of the word of God as it falls on the ear of man. We can understand from this, though, how while He kept on preaching and

told His Apostles to do the same in spite of the results that might be obtained, He saved the greatest sermon of His life for the Cross, and then let only seven words escape His lips; and how He kept the greatest sermon of His Redemptive program for the Eucharist where He speaks to hearts in silence and never breaks the spell by any spoken word—where the silence grows so deep at times that we can almost hear the heart-beat of our God. This should remind us all that the greatest sermons we shall ever preach will be the sermons of our daily lives, that more souls may be won to God. Souls are made more God-like by the faithful lives of humble hearts than by the rhythmic eloquence of a Lacordaire. Every man of God feels at times the hopelessness of preaching. He may or may not be convincing, and while he knows the word of God works silently in hearts and that miracles are being wrought even now, still no one but a visionary can fail to see the wasted efforts of the words he uses when he speaks of God.

The word of God alone seems to have this effect. Men have not lost interest in the words of

their fellowmen. More books, more magazines, more pamphlets are being read these days than ever. People have never been more interested in the words of men. One can't attend a banquet and digest his food without listening to an after-dinner speaker. Look how radio's slim fingers have reached out to touch unseen audiences. Men are listening as they never have before to the human word, and being stirred to action. The power of words and their effectiveness have kept pace with the march of science and the progress made in all other things. And yet the word of God, who gives us science and the word which is being spread by every new instrument of science, is as fruitless in some respects today as it was when these same words dropped from the lips of Christ, there on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. And whereas Christ might have taken consolation from the thought that many did not hear Him, or hearing did not understand, even this is denied those who preach today, for the word of God has never been preached more widely, the Church has never been more vocal.

There are two kinds of listen-

ers not mentioned in the Gospel of today, just as barren as those other types with whom the word of God was ineffective. They are the ones who will not listen and the ones who listen but resent what has been said. The first turn off the dial of their hearts and turn nothing but a deaf ear whenever God is mentioned. The unreasonable man will never listen, but there are not many unreasonable men in this world. Most of those who seem unreasonable are just poor people, misinformed and with a grudge against their God. They are not conscious of being unreasonable but they are intense, and maybe some day they may be just as intense in their admiration.

There are those who listen to a part of what God wants us to know—they listen to the part they like. Like the Catholic who will not restrain his uncharitable thoughts, they take the word of God and break it up into parts and mix it as they would a diet, little knowing that all God's words are necessary, containing as they do vitamins necessary for our spiritual growth. And since they take only part of that which God has revealed they are only part-time religious people and a bit anemic spiritually.

There is another group of listeners who actually resents what is being said. They accept what does not bother them but if any part of the word of God points a finger at some particular practice in their lives, if it interferes, for example, with their ease or recreation, they resent that part. They hush their common sense and conscience by trying to persuade themselves the words are not for them, but must apply to others. The resentment here is toward religion, and they complain religion does not understand the times; but at the very moment they say this their voices mock them. They know in their heart of hearts that their religion is not behind the times. Their religion is beyond the times and above the times and ahead of the times, for anyone who keeps his eye upon eternity is conscious of the past, the present, and the future.

All of us are children reaching for the sky. The soil around us differs, as every sower knows; and every heart is different too. Upon the depth and richness of the soil depends the abundance of the harvest. Upon the depth and richness of your soul will depend the results of what God says to you. When God speaks,

listen—it is the Master who would have a word with you.

If the word of God has not borne the fruit it should have borne, the fault may not be entirely in the manner of its presentation, or in the manner of listening. No one has a monopoly on faults. It is only when we think how much more effective than the word of God are the words of lesser ones that we give the subject thought at all. You know the effects the words of the fallen dictators had on their distressed countries. They talked their people into doing what they did.

If the world has reached the crisis some men say it has, this crisis has been brought about by

too much listening, and better listening, to the words of lesser ones than Christ. The world today is filled with listening posts, but the beam is not always turned toward God that the world may hear His voice.

The world needs regeneration, a regeneration that can only follow when men of every creed take the word of God to their hearts. What chance has this world got if the world will not listen to the word of God? With the whole world looking toward the Stars and Stripes for leadership, what chance does this world possess if religious-minded men and women in our beloved America turn their faces and their ears away from God?

NO DETOUR HERE

Talk given on March 3, 1946

“Lord, that I may see” (*Luke* 18:41). On the threshold of another Lent this blind man’s prayer might well become a universal plea that God might take away the mist before our eyes and enable us to see in all truth the needs of our immortal souls. The Apostles were as blind as he who asked for the gift of seeing, but they did not know enough to ask for it. They understood not anything of what Our Lord had said to them. They would have to learn the hard way. Our Lord kept trying to inform them of the great secret in His heart—the hidden meaning of the Cross—that the Son of Man would be mocked and scourged and spit upon, and they understood it not. Later they were angry when a wiser one than they asked for the gift of seeing. This miracle of seeing was all tied up with Christ’s proposed visit to Jerusalem where they would see things with their own eyes, but they would not understand.

Lent may come too often to ourselves if we fail to see its purpose. Lent may come too

often to ourselves if we fail to see its need. Men said complimentary things about the basic training given the members of our Armed Forces as a preparation for the last war, and those who appear to know contend that our casualties were decreased by thousands because of the toughening process our men went through in their military training. Lent has ever been a period of basic training for a spiritual engagement that never really ends until we pass from the present theater of action. And Lent must necessarily be repeated for the opposition to our souls does not kill us outright, it rather softens us that it might kill us on another day. Lent offsets the softness that develops throughout the year, when the Cross becomes remote and our attitude toward pain undergoes a change and we forget that self-denial is the lot of all who follow Christ, that the Cross is the hallmark of our faith. Oh, Lord that we may see—see the necessity of being different if we are to be like Christ.

The idea of training underlies the whole conception of self-denial, that we may be spiritually fit as the men of our Armed Forces sought to be physically fit for their particular struggle. Self-denial is no virtue in itself and surely not an end in itself. Our God is not a gloomy God reveling in the thought that those who follow Him must make themselves miserable by self-denial and self-inflicted pain. Self-denial gets all its value from the fact that human nature, from too much pampering, may come on evil ways. Self-denial is a build-up against the ravages of sin. It trains the will in saying no to legitimate inducements, that the illegitimate may never have a chance. Self-denial in itself is not desirable. We seek it only as a means by which we can preserve the higher things; and for those who may be troubled about the limits to which their self-inflicted pain should go we need only remind them that while self-denial is essential for their spiritual progress, the particular form depends upon their personal circumstances.

Necessary then for the Christian way of living, self-denial must be gauged according to the

extent to which it helps or hinders the Christian way of life. Most of us are now convinced that sacrifice was necessary for the success of our country's efforts. It should not take too much to convince ourselves that sacrifice is necessary for the success of our eternal lives. It is justified alone because it is a preparation leading up to greater things, and since our lives are nothing more or less than a preparation for the great things above, there is something lacking in the life that is a stranger to self-denial and self-inflicted pain. If Paul, himself, was forced to cry out about the necessity of chastising himself, lest he become a castaway, who of us can be sure that without chastisement we shall be spiritually acceptable?

Lent, then, is a period of basic training for the ups and downs of life, and since it is altogether possible that by choosing a foolish system, or by exaggerating the limit necessary, or by paying insufficient attention to the training, we may unfit ourselves for future effort, so too if we deny ourselves too much or too little we may unfit ourselves for following Christ. It should be said that self-denial should begin

where the needs of life leave off, and the needs of life leave off where denial should begin. Self-denial has to do with what is over and above the margin of decent living. The luxuries of life are self-denial's targets: the luxury of sleep, the luxury of ease, the luxury of appetite, the luxury of pleasure. Never have we been so conscious of the need of physical fitness as we were during the last few years. The Draft Boards kept reminding men of that. Lent should remind us all that there is another side to all of us—the spiritual. Lent has a particular summons for those who are spiritually 4-F.

Self-denial can never be much else, however, than an expression of our love. Love it is that leads us to give up pleasure for those we love in a human way. The thorn-crowned head of Christ catches our imagination and cannot fail to stimulate our willingness to deny ourselves out of love for Him. Self-denial in the way of mere self-discipline, however necessary this may be, will not touch the hearts of all or touch the hearts enough, but self-denial as a token of our love for Christ can escape only the hard of heart. We may be cold to the sacrifices of our soldiers

but the sight of wounded veterans cannot fail to touch all hearts. A land without ruins may be very fair to look upon, but a land without ruins is a land without memories, and a land without memories is a land without history and has small appeal. A head that wears a laurel crown may be very fair to look upon, but a head that wears a crown of thorns, and wears those crowns for us, excites our love. Lent reminds me I should be sorry for the One whose supreme effort made the efforts of lesser ones worth while.

Self-sacrifice, self-denial, and self-inflicted pain lift us out of the ordinary class and put us in the class of Christ, His Mother, and the Saints. It is a sign of aristocracy among religious-minded men and women. Self-denial has always been the badge of those who occupy the inner circle, of those who have really accepted the invitation to drink the Chalice which has been drunk. Self-inflicted pain can banish loneliness, for the suffering Christ is ever looking down, searching for His imitators, and His Mother is ever hovering near, mindful of her own lonely vigil near the One who is inspiring us. The sting is gone

from our self-sacrifice when we remember Christ is near and looking down with gratitude and tenderness and love. The Holy Spirit gives His strength each day. The flesh may shrink, and justly so, but the spirit is made strong by Christ. Mindful then of what we are commemorating—the self-denial of Our Lord—who of us can remain untouched? There must be sorrow in our life, there must be self-denial for our life to be complete and to resemble Christ's—for sacrifice in the nature of self-inflicted pain stamps us as loyal followers of the King. When our natural enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—have done their worst to us, they will not have the last word. The last word

will be spoken by Our Lord when He shall have confessed us before His Father who is in Heaven. Having suffered for Him and flung away the world's pleasure deliberately, we shall stand before Him, our service stripes upon our sleeves. Christ alone can explain the Crucifixion and Christ alone can explain our self-denial. We cannot take our ease when we think of how uneasy was the Head that was crowned with thorns. For Christ we do unusual things in Lent, that we may fill up and lighten the burden of His suffering. The hill of Calvary cannot be by-passed. There is no detour here for if we miss Calvary we shall miss the loveliness of Him who was crucified thereon.

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