# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

*Series: "The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy"*

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JULY 26, 1959

# " The Hospital Apostolate "

MY DEAR FRIENDS, it is nearly fourteen years since World War II is supposed to have ended. Yet today the world seems to be in more critical condition than ever before. A recent pronouncement of Pope John XXIII warned the world "against slipping in complete blindness toward a new and frightful conflagration." The Pope said, "There already has been enough strife among men. Already too many cemeteries of those fallen in war cover the earth's surface and solemnly warns that all should be brought back to harmony, unity, and a just peace. We exhort to this harmony and peace particularly those who hold the reins of government — If the nations don't aim at fraternal unity resting on the precepts of justice and nourished by charity, then the gravest crisis continues."

JUSTICE AND CHARITY — these are the foundation stones on which a new and peaceful world must be built. Pope John would remind all, particularly the leaders and rulers of nations, that they must exemplify true love and

compassionate feeling toward the whole of mankind. An American soldier said about the same thing on Aug. 7, 1942 after he had participated in the bloody battle of Guadalcanal in the South Pacific. Talking to a missionary priest friend, the young G.I. said, "Father, we can win this war. We can beat the enemy over the head, yes! But it is only what you do — the work of the Church — that can really win the peace."

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH! What is this work of the Church of which the young soldier spoke? It is the work of Christ for His poor, His aged, His sick, His orphans, His underprivileged. It is well-outlined in the story of a little Japanese orphan whom I met one day in 1947 on a Tokyo street when I was serving as a chaplain in the United States Air Force.

I had met many of these youngsters wandering the streets, their homes bombed-out, their people killed — living from hand to mouth, begging food and clothing from the American servicemen. Most of them, however, had a little shabby dress or trousers, were barefooted, and the boys always had the scrubby — down to the pate — haircut. But the orphan whose story I relate here was different; at least in external appearance. Instead

of the shabby trousers and bare feet, he had a white shirt, blue tie, neatly pressed trousers, slicky combed hair and well-shined shoes.

He introduced himself as "Tony" — and by the way, he spoke English well — too well, if you know what I mean. He had learned all the words that weren't in the dictionary. I had to tell Tony that certain words were not used in polite society.

Tony was well-dressed. He had more candy and coca-colas than some of the street urchins — But, what about the future, when the generous American serviceman would leave and he would be on his own? — I had to tell Tony how important it was that he go to school to prepare for life ahead. I don't think he believed me when I told him that, *"School is good!"* but at least he promised to come with me "for a try" to the mission school and orphanage conducted by the Salesian Fathers outside of Tokyo City.

I hoped that Tony would remain at the orphanage school, but feared that he would soon be back to wander the streets. However, when I went out to visit the orphans a month or so later, I found Tony sitting at his desk in the little Japanese classroom, and asked him how he liked his new home and school. The 10-year

old youngster replied in real G.I. parlance, saying: *"I never had it so good!"* — and Tony meant that. The loving care of the missionary fathers and sisters had given Tony a new meaning to life. He had been fed well, clothed comfortably, had learned the importance of study and preparation for the future, and had been taught about the one true God. Before I returned to the United States, some year or more after Tony started at the mission school, I paid him a visit to find he had been baptized, received his First Holy Communion and Confirmation; and one of the greatest thrills of my life was to hear this little lad — picked up from the streets from Tokyo — join with his young companions to sing "God Bless America".

But, Tony is only one of the millions — black, white, yellow, red; young, old, blind, halt and lame — to whom the missionaries of the Catholic Church, brothers, sisters, priests — yes, and lay people, bring the compassionate love and mercy of Christ.

I saw these missionaries in the Philippine Islands working in the terrific heat of the tropical sun. I saw them on Okinawa... I saw them in Japan. Some of the scenes I witnessed in Japan I can never forget.

One night I was led down deep into

the tunnels near Ueno Station in the heart of Tokyo City to witness missionary sisters at work in their makeshift medical dispensary. These sisters, I learned, during the two years since the start of the American occupation, had worked almost day and night for the poorest of the poor. They treated the sick, the blind, those afflicted in any and every way, and had even delivered 900 babies into the world in their underground medical station. Two of the sisters were medical doctors and almost all were well-trained registered nurses.

One of the most indescribable yet most unforgettable sights of all was that in the lepresarium near Tokyo. I will never forget this experience! I saw human bodies, flesh eaten away from hands, face, legs. (Some had no ears, or had mere sunken sockets for eyes. Running sores covered the bodies of many). These people were outcasts from human society. Nobody wanted them. Their own people never came to see them. But, hour after hour, day after day, the missionary sisters walked among them, bathing their sores, bandaging their afflicted parts, above all — loving them with truly Christlike hearts.

My Dear Friends — This is the work of the Church of which the young soldier

spoke after the Battle of Guadalcanal! The spirit of these dedicated servants of God is well expressed in the words of a nun who had spent 27 years of her life working with the Eskimos in Alaska. This sister wrote, "I tell you in all sincerity that my love for Our Lord has grown more and more ever since these early days here. I feel no difficulty now in seeing Christ really present in all my companions and in the children whom I teach. It is really heaven on earth for me, and nobody can take this joy out of my heart! I feel Our Lord cannot hide from me any more, as He used to do, because I am always thinking of Him and finding Him in all His creatures."

These works of mercy I've related have taken place in distant parts of the world. But this merciful work of Christ and His Church goes on around you every day in your home-town or city — almost anywhere in the United States. In New York City is the New York Foundling Hospital. In this wonderful haven of charity what loving care is given by the sisters and their lay aides — many of them volunteers — to little tots, abandoned in subways, left on doorsteps, and sent to the Foundling Hospital. Recently the administrator of the Hospital told me a story that may be just coincidence but

more probably is a sign from a loving God of the great need for this noble work. The very day that the Foundling Hospital was opened in 1869, an abandoned baby was found on its doorstep — and on the very day of the removal of the Hospital to its present site in November 1958, a baby was found abandoned in a subway station and taken to the new building.

At the New York Foundling Hospital hundreds of infants are cared for daily. With no regard to race, creed, or color, wonderful Catholic sisters feed, dress, wash, nurse, and give the utmost of affection and love to these little ones. From these foundlings have come two governors of states, well-known movie actors, big business executives, a number of priests and nuns, and many other men and women very successful in various fields of life.

The labor of the Church for those at the other extreme of life may be witnessed at the now internationally-known Mary Manning Walsh Home for the Aging in New York. I wish that I could bring each one of you to meet Mother Bernadette, a brilliant, bright-eyed sister with sparkling personality who acts as administrator of the Home. She could tell you of the work of Holy Mother Church for men and women in their twilight years. She could tell

you of the growth of the Carmelite Sisters for the Aging in 28 years to over 400 nuns with 23 homes for our elder citizens in 12 different states. She could escort you through the model residence for the advanced in years with its devoted staff of sisters, most dedicated to this very difficult and very specialized labor of love.

She would introduce you to Dr. Francis Schneider, 94-year old retired Medical Doctor, who would enthusiastically tell you of the comfortable home he enjoys in his declining years. Every physical, mental, social and religious need is supplied by the sisters and staff. Or you might meet Miss Loretta Keegan, a 75-year old blind lady, a double amputee who had a stroke and can only make guttural sounds to let you know how happy she is to be a resident of the Walsh home.

At the infirmary you would meet Sister Daniel Marie tending to her sick ladies, hoping and praying, no matter how sick they are that God will be pleased to spare them a little longer. This "little longer" through her prayers and loving care often becomes a number of years. One of the sick, has been dying for two years, but she still waits every night for Sister Daniel to "tuck her in".

I mention Mother Bernadette and Sister

Daniel Marie by name, but they are only typical of thousands of Catholic sisters all over the world leading similarly dedicated lives. The spirit of these Sisters may best be expressed in the answer of a young nun to a fastidiously dressed business man who watched her at her work. The man said, "Sister, I wouldn't do what you do, for a million dollars." The sister answered, "Neither would I".

The sisters do everything for these aging people — feed them, wash them, clothe them, carry their bed pans. Nothing is too hard, because it is done for Christ! The living is wonderful for these old people, and the dying is beautiful. The priest chaplain is often consoled by the faith and readiness for death of these people, as they prepare to go home to God. One 93-year old man said on his deathbed, "Father, this is the happiest day of my life, because you're here to give me the Sacrament of the Church, and I'm all ready to meet God when he wants me."

To see more of the merciful Christ in Action through His church, you might visit one of the Catholic hospitals in your part of the country. Or you might wish to follow the daily rounds of the Catholic chaplain serving in any secular hospital. Here the priest is carrying out

to the fullest, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. You would hear him talk to the parents of a little 8-year old girl doomed to die of Leukemia, reminding this grieving father and mother of the great goodness of God who, if He ever gives a Cross to those that bear it well, He more than makes return a thousand-fold. You would hear him talk gently, kindly, comfortingly to a man now 85, and dying of cancer; for 60 years an avowed Communist and estranged from His Church. It was the daughter of this former bitter enemy of the Church, herself converted from Communism, who wrote after her father's death to the chaplain at New York Hospital: "I wanted to thank you again for all that you did for my Dad during the past week — and for myself as well. It is very difficult to put into words all that you sent our way. But I think you know without saying so, just how much it meant to have my Dad return to the sacraments. I can't thank you enough for your considerateness, your consistent visits to his bedside — but most of all for the understanding that made it possible for him to receive the last sacraments, and be one with my Lord at the hour of his death. God has certainly blessed you Father, that so much of Himself can reach out to hearts that are

so far away from Him and draw them close!"

This is the answer of the Church to the modern-day materialist who would shout out, "Show Us Your Works" – as atheists and unbelievers did in the time of St. Vincent de Paul. These are the works of the Church! These are the truly compassionate acts of the Mystical Body of Christ, Lord and Saviour of the world. This is the charity which Pope John XXIII in his recent pronouncement prescribed as the remedy for the malignancy of selfishness and hate, that is sipping away the vitality of contemporary society. Charity does not mean handouts, programs, techniques or theories. Charity is no more and no less than the love of God and the love of neighbor for God's sake. Christ not only taught love of neighbor in the same proportion as love of self, but He showed others how to put this command into practice and then He delegated His Church to perpetuate until the end of time His doctrine of love and care for all those in need.

To the true Christian, the suffering and afflictions of his fellow men must be seen as the sufferings of Christ. He must see Christ in the sick, the blind, the lame, the orphaned, the aged and the poor. Christ calls out from the depth of

the love of His Sacred Heart to each one who calls himself a Christian. "I have come to cast fire upon the earth and what will I but that it be enkindled!" This fire of Christ's love enkindled in your heart and in mine, that we may ever be truly other Christs to those in need — performing at every opportunity the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

I, AS A PRIEST, must have this compassion — this real feeling for others that makes me want to alleviate suffering because I truly love God. You, my listeners, as lay Christians, must have the same compassion. Some few of you may be called to the priesthood, sisterhood, or brotherhood to go to distant lands to preach the gospel as those whose story I have related to you at the beginning of my talk today. Others may have religious vocations to be carried out here in the United States. *But all of you* are called to share in the charitable works of the Church! You don't have to go to Japan, Okinawa, the Philippine Islands, the Arctic Regions, or to Africa.

LEADERS OF THE PEOPLE, get out of your ivory towers — go down to the streets — to the havens of charity, to the poor! See at first hand the tragic suffering and sorrow that exists, and then do something about it — not just

politically, but from your hearts! All my listeners of every rank and degree and station in life, you can all help. You can all practice the justice and participate in the charity that will truly change the world and bring the lasting peace for which we yearn!

NOT FAR FROM YOU, wherever you live in these United States, is a hospital, a home for the aged, or an orphans' or foundlings' home. Volunteers are almost always needed. Will you do something for me today and for Our Lord? Will you go visit the Hospital, Home for the Aged or Orphanage nearest to your home and promise to give some of your time, your talents, your heart — your love to these works of mercy, and compassion? *And will you do just one more thing for me?* If you do this — if you volunteer to help at one of these havens of charity — will you let me know by letter that my humble words this afternoon were effective in this way?

MY DEAR FRIENDS — I'VE TALKED A GREAT DEAL about CHARITY TODAY. May I sum up all in the beautiful words of St. Augustine, who said: "Charity has hands to help. It has feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see and notice the misery and want of others. It has ears to hear their

sighs and wails. Above all, it has a heart to love and to bless – THIS IS TRUE CHARITY!"

God bless you all!

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