

Manton, Joseph E.
Spring Fervor
ADU 1146



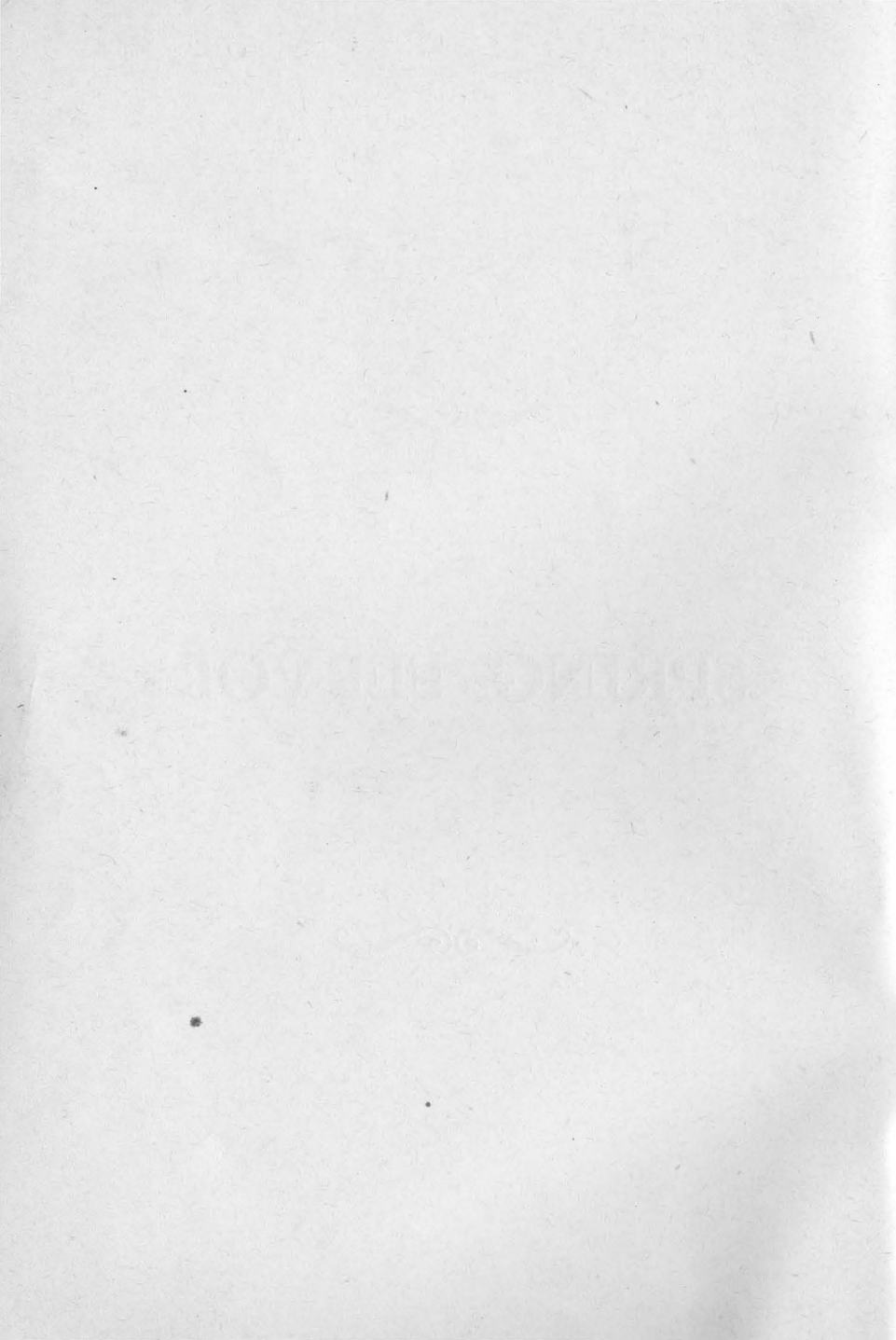
Spring Fervor

Rev. Joseph E. Manton



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BY

REV. JOSEPH E. MANTON

of The Redemptorist Fathers

Five addresses delivered by Rev. Joseph E. Manton, on the Catholic Hour during April, 1950. The Catholic Hour, in its twenty-first year of existence, is 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:

VERY REV. MSGR. T. E. DILLON

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:

✠ JOHN FRANCIS NOLL, D.D.

Bishop of Fort Wayne

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THE OTHER LAW

Address delivered on April 1, 1951

The other day I was visiting a Rectory, and there on the wall hung a very gaunt and impressive crucifix—though, to tell the truth, I was more impressed by the two lovely paintings of Our Lady that hung on either side. The picture on the left portrayed Mary kneeling in prayer, eyes modestly cast down, hands devoutly folded, while a very courtly Archangel was announcing to her that soon her Cousin Elizabeth would give birth to John the Baptist. Now the other painting showed the reaction, the response. There was Mary hurrying over the rolling green hills of Galilee, her white robe fluttering like a sail on the waves, as she hurried to help Elizabeth in her imminent confinement. Somehow to me, these two pictures flanking the Cross of Christ like wings on a stage, seem to catch the spirit of the whole drama of Christianity. For— isn't it true?—the first picture shows religion at prayer; the second, religion in practise. The service of God in the Temple, and the service of neighbor in town!

We need both but we more easily forget the second. And when Christianity falters (it never can fail) the reason will never shine in the sharp bayonets of persecution. The Church patiently buries her persecutors, and makes each tombstone an altarstone over which she sings the Te Deum of her new deliverance. Nor will the reason be the false doctrines of Communism, which is only the contemporary heresy, and which eventually will go into the musty files of the finished business with the Arianism or Nazism. Arianism — once half the Christian world was Arian; how many can even define it now? No—when Christianity falters, there is only one reason—Christians! You know there are people, and if you hinted they were half-pagan, they would broil you with an incredulous glare; but as a matter of cold, objective fact, they are only half-Christian. They practice only fifty percent of God's law. Oh, let the church bells tumble about in their towers and ring the call to prayer, the law of the love of God, and they answer eagerly.

But let the doorbell ring—somebody in need or in trouble—(the law of the love of neighbor) and somehow they can't seem to hear!

Put them in a quiet prayerful church, especially at sunset when every stained-glass window blazes like a flower-garden, and the soft candle-light mellows the pale and peaceful statues, and perhaps a rosary rustles leisurely through their fingers, and they love it! But this is only half of religion: religion under the steeple. The other half is the harder half: religion out there among the people. Surely, it is considerably easier to live piously and righteously among the statues and stained-glass windows! Why there is no trouble at all—no irritations, no complications, no obligations.

But remember God made *the people*. God loves the people. God died for the people. He didn't die for any statue or any stained-glass window, or for any rosary even though fashioned from olive wood and brought all the way from Jerusalem or Lourdes or Rome. Why, the sorriest, most soiled and tattered wreck of humanity that shambles along a city street is more precious in

the eye of God than the most glorious statue of the Madonna executed by the most famous artist and exhibited in the world's greatest museum. Because the only purpose of the painting is to lift up the minds and hearts of human beings to the love of God, and (for His Sake) the love of neighbor!

That is why it has always struck me as a bit strange (maybe your experience is different) but I have never seen in any rectory or in any church a picture or a statue of a certain Scriptural figure who stands very high in the Litany of practical charity. Maybe he is not the champion, or even the challenger, but only a candidate; still his particular deed was very dear to the Heart of Christ. We don't even know his name, but History has always called him the Good Samaritan, and admirers for short have called him just Good Sam. Anyway, here he is loping along on horseback over the sloping road that dips down from Jerusalem toward Jericho; and suddenly, there in the bushes beside the road, he sees a groaning Jew, beaten up, bleeding, robbed by bandits, helpless and pitiful . . . The marvelous thing about the story is that the Samaritan did

something; did it right away; did it himself.

If you don't think that was pretty extraordinary, just remember that a priest and a le-vite, who had possibly just come from the Temple at Jerusalem, passed by—as coldly as icebergs in the Labrador current. But the Samaritan stopped. And notice too the easy and obvious things the Good Samaritan didn't do. He didn't wring his hands in pity and murmur, "Poor fellow! How I pity you! My heart goes out to you!" He didn't stroke his beard and mutter, "I wonder who this chap is, and how did it all happen?" He didn't unload a quantity of that very free and futile product, good advice, and say very cheerfully, "Come now, my man, you must learn to help yourself. On your feet with you! You can if you try, you know." He didn't wrinkle his brow and begin to wonder, "If I were the one in this mess, would anybody stop and help *me*?" He didn't get official and formal and shake his head and say, "This situation is horrible. Of course when I get to Jericho I shall report it immediately to the proper agency." He didn't put his hands on his hips and get I-told-you-so-ish and say, "Well, after all, if a chap is go-

ing to travel this road alone and in the dead of night, what can he expect? He's inviting assault and robbery!"

No—the marvel of the whole story is that the Good Samaritan saw a man in trouble. He did something promptly. He did it personally. He did it practically.

And furthermore—he did it for someone who meant nothing to him at all. There was no human attraction in the case. He wasn't playing the gallant knight to a beautiful young damsel in distress. He was a Samaritan before anybody ever heard of a "Good Samaritan"; and the man bleeding in the bushes was a Jew. Probably the closest modern parallel to the feeling between the Jew and the Samaritan in Palestine, was the feeling of a few years ago between the Irishmen of St. Patrick in the South of Ireland and the Orangemen of Ulster in the North. The Jews despised the Samaritans for "selling out" to the Romans. They looked down on the Samaritans as half-breeds. They hated the Samaritans as heretics. But the Good Samaritan never thought of these things. All he knew was that there in trouble was his brother in the great family of humanity, his

brother because they were both children of God — so, like a brother he helped him!

And oh, notice this, because here is where most charity stops dead. People will make the highest resolves, the noblest promises—to themselves or to others—and then, then they run flush against the realization that this is going to cost them something, cost them in some way or other, and they draw back. They didn't think the water was going to be so cold. But not the Good Samaritan! And it *cost* him, too. It cost him time and trouble, to begin with. It interrupted and delayed his journey. Very possibly it made him miss an important appointment. Possibly it meant explanations to his wife who was waiting with fire in her eye and thunder on her tongue. It cost him physical effort. He had to bandage up the poor fellow as best he could, heft him up on the horse, and himself trudge along on foot all the way to the inn. It cost him the oil and wine he poured into the wound. It cost him money to the innkeeper . . . And that's the last we see of the Good Samaritan as he goes riding down the road of history, an obscure, humble figure without benefit of press agent, who

never even turns around in his saddle to show his face. I wonder how many of us will ever catch up with him, Christians or Catholics though we be?

Who was it that said God had divided man into men so that they might help one another? Yet you will find people who bubble and gush, for example, about their love for the Mother of God, but who never dream of giving any practical help to some other poor mother who really needs it. If there is sickness in that mother's home, they never think to drop around to help straighten out the house or stir up a meal. They would never get the idea to manoeuvre in a very tactful and delicate way to outfit one of the children for First Communion, or send one of them away to summer camp. Children? Listen to some good church people prate of their tender and vibrant love for the Child Jesus, and you might be impressed; but you soon find out that He is the only child they do tolerate and that at a pious and poetic distance. Every other child is apparently just a brat, brats to be shooed away from playing in front of their door; and the youngsters scatter like a flock of sparrows! That is all they are, little grey sparrows

hopping around the city streets. Still not one of these sparrows falls, but He knows it and loves it.

Didn't Our Blessed Lord say, "Whatsoever you do to the least of My brethren, you do to Me?" There is the difficulty: to recognize God behind the masks of men. But we have to do it. Because when He appeals to us for help, He won't send a special Star of Bethlehem pointing its finger of fire to the spot where we are to do our bit of good. Charity done for Christ doesn't need fireworks and a full heavenly choir. No, Our Blessed Lord will always stand in the shadows, and under the guise of some poor creature, even as He hid that Christmas Eve under Mary's ample robe. Some one else always knocks at the door for Him, as at the Inn at Bethlehem. If that door had not slammed and shuddered in His Face, to this day men would have beaten

a path to it, the most famous Shrine in the world! As it is, it is only the sad symbol of Christ unrecognized, Christ turned away!

In these matters you cannot go wrong in following the Saints. Yet here is something fairly startling from the life of one of them. One Holy Thursday Morning, Blessed Angela of Foligno, with her girl companion, went to the Cathedral church. They heard Holy Mass, received Communion, made their thanksgiving, and then Blessed Angela nudged her companion. "Come on," she whispered, "it's all over here. Now let's go out and find Christ among the poor and the sick and the needy." Our Blessed Lord *is still out there* among them. So, hands clasped in prayer? By all means! But don't forget to unclasp them and reach them out to any neighbor in need! The body you help may be anybody's, but the soul you save will be your own! God bless you!

THE TEARS OF CHRIST

Address delivered on April 8, 1951

In our parish we are the chaplains to twelve hospitals, and the other evening as I came out of one of them, high up upon a hill that overlooks the city, and before I began striding down that steep ski-run of zig-zag streets that drops down to the rectory, I stopped to admire the magnificent view, the brilliance and the beauty of the city's lights. There they were, spread out like a giant garden of electric flowers, green and scarlet and gold. Sometimes they all seemed to shimmer and flash in the atmosphere, and it was as though someone had laid out before you a huge tray of multicolored gems for inspection and selection. Or the height of the hill impressed you, and it was like looking down on Fairyland from the top seat in a ferris-wheel.

But then, for some reason, I glanced up, and my eye caught the street-lamp I was standing under, the light I was closest to. And do you know — it was streaked and crusty and smudged with dirt? Yet this was one of those lights down there, one of those golden bubbles, one

of those distant jewels, which were beautiful only because they were far away. And I don't doubt that any one of them, if you could get close enough, would be streaked and crusty too. And I wondered if that is the difference between man and God. Man sees other men always at a deceitful distance; but God sees every man at close-range, point-blank; not merely the appearance, but the reality: just as he is!

And isn't that the reason that one afternoon, when Christ stood upon a lofty hill, and looked down upon the beautiful city of Jerusalem, *He cried?* This despite the fact that before him lay a glittering spectacle; the Temple's golden dome winking back at the sun as to an older brother; the marble turrets standing like frozen fountains; the gay-tiled roofs glowing here and there amid the green trees like Oriental rugs. And yet, Christ did not catch his breath and sigh like a man who wanted to paint all this beauty into a picture, or enshrine all this loveliness in the locket of a poem. Christ just cried. Why? Wasn't

it because He was seeing not merely the city but the citizens; not just houses but human hearts; not the scenery but the sin?

I wonder if Our Blessed Lord in His white robe stood up there on the hill and looked down upon our city or your city or any city, would tears come to His thoughtful eyes? As He gazes down on the distant city, the city draped with lines of electric fire, the "city smoky and populous like Hell," the city with its faint human and mechanical hum floating up to him — would He weep again? Well, you are as good a judge of that as anyone, so stand beside Him, you, and look at it down there, the city and the lights — the dazzling rainbows of neon, the shooting sprays of color — all the flickering vigil-lights before the shrine of advertising! At Bethlehem the Heavens showed forth the glory of God, but here these man-made stars burst forth to the glory of some gasoline or some ten-cent cigar. Still, if you keep your distance from it all, and as at a museum stand back of the red velvet rope so you don't see the daubs of oil but just the whole painting, the city does make an enchanting effect. The skyline spiked with tall buildings, light-

ed here and there with golden squares like honeycombs; the graceful arches of the bridges; the highways coiling in and out like loops of silver braid; and over it all and around it all the lights, like strings of bright balloons hung for a festival— yes, it is all very picturesque and attractive, as long as you have eyes only for the technicolor splendor, and are willing to forget the dirt and grime, the tragedies, the sins, the souls!

But the deep, searching eyes of Our Lord would look down and see nothing but souls. And tears would glisten in those eyes because amid all this apparent beauty, this artificial glamor, look at what sin is doing to souls! Down there in the city, He sees Drunkenness lurching out of the tavern door with bulbous eyes and bleary face and beery breath, more a cartoon than a man, and staggering off to bring a little of the atmosphere of hell into some broken-hearted home. Down there in the city Christ sees flaming-faced Anger still staring and glaring at the door it has just slammed, while on the other side of the door a sobbing daughter turns desperately to the street. Down in the city, Christ sees wild-eyed Gambling, tense and sick in

the stomach, throwing down its worthless cards or tearing up its useless tickets, knowing it is tearing up green dollars that should have gone for groceries. Down in the city, Christ sees Lust with its shifty eye and wandering hands, now whispering soft flatteries into a silly ear, as it turns the car out toward the dark lonely stretches of the countryside. Down in the city, Christ sees Unfaithfulness slyly slipping off its wedding ring, and hurrying to its rendezvous of broken vows, but strangely a ring still shows faintly upon the finger — a scarlet circle.

Down in the city, the Scholar is busy writing his big book, proving there is no God, and using (or abusing) the brain God gave him to do it. Down in the city, the little atheist is stamping on his soap-box and screaming that there can be no God, because God does not see fit to distinguish him out of a billion people and strike him dead this minute, as per instructions. Down in the city, the scientists in the white coats are watching their bubbling test-tubes, studying how to preserve human blood. And across the city, other scientists in white coats are pondering their tables of atomic radiation, studying how to de-

stroy human blood. In the university, the professor is carefully bringing his class up to date on the meaning of words: what used to be pure has now become puritanical; and what used to be condemned on the stage as raw is now commended as realistic. Meanwhile, newsboys peddling their papers after school, sing out in their high young voices the slimiest scandals of the city. . . and the cars purr by, and the crowds hurry along, and the electric signs blink.

There is good in the city too, of course. Like the widowed mother up there in one of those skyscrapers, on her knees in an empty office, soaking up the dirty footprints of people she has never seen, in order to buy shoes for the two youngsters she doesn't see enough. Or like all those clean young girls scattered all over the city like water-lillies on a scummy pond. Or like all those unappreciated Dads, with calloused hands and soft hearts, who work hard, say little, and love much.

Oh there is good in the city, but slow tears are sliding down the cheeks of Christ because of all the evil there, the rising, spreading, overflowing mass of evil; because the city lies under

a smoky pall of sin. Does it depress you? It depressed Our Blessed Lord too. That is why He cried, yes, that is why He died. Isn't it about time that we of the city should look up to Christ and weep — weep because in the beginning God made the world a garden of goodness, and we have made it a city of sin; because we have taken the beautiful blooming tree of life, the life and innocence He gave us, and turned it into the dead ugly tree of the cross; yes, because if He hangs up there on that cross, the nails that hold Him were forged in the hot fires of our passion. Each year in the springtime, during Holy Week, the statues are draped in purple, and we know that Good Friday is near. Have you ever thought of those draped statues, huddled, indistinct, mysterious figures as the ghosts of your past sins, rising at that tragic time to haunt you and remind you of all the pain your guilty pleasure cost Him. . . taking you to that other hill looking down upon the city of Jerusalem, where it was not tears He shed but splashing Blood?

Yes, Our Lord looked down upon the city twice. Once, from Mount Olivet, and He weeps for

it. And once, from Mount Calvary, and He bleeds for it. Shall we, like Jerusalem, forget both the tears and the blood? You too, He says, you whom I have loved and blessed? Oh, suppose that on the black-edged day when they pushed Him out of the city and prodded Him up the hill to be crucified, He saw that the man leading the gory procession, and gleefully pointing that way was the man whose blind eyes He had opened; and over the howling and hooting of the mob He heard the jeering voice of the man whose tongue He had loosed; and suppose as He lay flat upon the cross with outstretched hands, He looked up and knew that the arm that swung the clanging hammer was the withered arm He had made straight and strong—that is just how Our Saviour still feels when we, His own, sin against Him! He is Our God who has given us all we have, made us all we are, and—well, Judas betrayed Him only once. Isn't it time that we in the city should pause, and *look up to Him* on the cross, and weep ourselves? Let the cross be the new rod of Moses to strike the rock of our hearts, and let those saving waters, the tears of the spirit, flow forth for the evil we have done but, by His

tears and His Blood, we will not do again, so that our soul at least (and we are responsible for no more) will not be a grimy city of sin, but a garden of beauty like the garden through

which God walked in the morning of the world, and the garden through which His Son walked and met *the penitent Magdalen* on the morning of the Resurrection! God bless you!

BREATHLESS INTO HEAVEN

Address delivered on April 15, 1951

Today let us consider the case of Mike Machine Gun, gambler, gangster and Catholic. The name of course is pure fiction, but the circumstances are solid fact. And it happens often enough in every American city to make most Catholics want to cross to the other side of the street in order to avoid being hooked and thrown by the question marks of their non-Catholic friends.

Strangely enough the major trouble begins when Mike Machine Gun comes to his end. Not that he didn't cause trouble enough in his day — and his night. Behind him lies a rolling road of drunken parties, a twisted trail of broken hearts and empty bottles, the sad wreckage of other men's homes and business and lives. But comes the day when Mike Machine Gun suddenly crumples over the wheel of his cream-colored convertible, mowed down by the bullets of a rival mob. However, thanks to a natty steel vest he has been thoughtfully wearing, he is not killed outright. But Mike is dying. He knows he is dying. And Mike remembers he is a Catholic. Maybe

the last time he was inside a Catholic Church he was in the Seventh Grade, but he feels he is a Catholic. He always said he was a Catholic. He had always planned that he would die as a Catholic; though, to tell the truth, he had not planned on doing it so soon. Anyway, he in his agony groans for a priest. So in the white hospital room, as the black-clad priest with the purple stole round his neck bends over the bed, Mike Machine Gun hoarsely whispers his confession, his brutal story of shattered commandments and stained lives — the autobiography of a minor Beelzebub. Then the priest solemnly pronounces the absolution. With cool, moist thumb he anoints the eyes and ears and lips; administers the last rites. And Mike Machine Gun, in the middle of a panting, half-remembered prayer, goes into a shuddering convulsion, and then lies very still.

That evening the newspapers flare it — and the newscasts blare it — the story of this man about town who has suddenly left town for good. Mike Machine

Gun, gambler and gangster, died at Mercy Hospital early this afternoon. He received the last rites of the Catholic Church. He will be buried with a Requiem Mass from St. Mary's Church on Tuesday at ten.

People read this, and their eyebrows go up like awnings. Heads shake, and tongues cluck, and there are deep sighs of scandal. Not only non-Catholics, mind you; Catholics too. Why, the whole affair cheapens the church! — implying that a case like this hurts the Church's social prestige, or pulls down its batting average. It reduces all standards to elastic! — meaning, if you have enough pull the rules will stretch. It turns the hard, persevering virtue of earnest Christians into a farce. Because if this swaggering rake can lead a life like that, bowling down the ten commandments like ten-pins; walking arm in arm with the very devil all his days, till Death like a conductor shouts, "All aboard!" and then just hops on the train for Heaven as it is actually rolling out of the station — then what is the sense and where is the percentage in trying and striving to be good all your life? Why not choose what you fancy from every bright counter of sin, and then just

when the bill is about to come in, when the end is near — humbly and shyly declare bankruptcy, that is, go to confession; and presto, everything is cleared away and straightened out and the slate is absolutely empty. You've had your fun; and now, after all this, Heaven too! If Mike Machine Gun can get away with it, why can't other people?

That is just what I'd like you to remember. Other people do. I don't say they actually "get away with it." I don't admit that Mike Machine Gun "gets away with it." But at least notice that the case of Mike Machine Gun is no unique, towering exception in the pattern or the policy of the Church. The only thing exceptional about his case is the publicity. Why, in every hospital in the land, in almost every week of the year, the very same procedure is being followed with sinners whose names don't happen to be up in neon lights. Other men and other women, who have eaten every forbidden fruit in the devil's orchard, who have never said "no" to an impulse for forty years, who have lived and laughed and sinned under the bright lights of pleasure . . . but now when the darkness of death suddenly falls around them, and the noiseless

gate of eternity slowly swings open before them, and fear clutches at their heart, they turn to God too. Maybe it is just terror of the unknown ahead of them, maybe it is really disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the past behind them, maybe it is a sudden awakening and sorrow for sin. Anyway *they* send for a priest, and he comes. He hurries to the death-bed of lifelong sinners every day of the week, but they are obscure people, and so nobody pays any attention because nobody cares. But because Mike Machine Gun has lived his life under the television lights of prominence and notoriety, when he dies this way everybody notices and everybody wonders. They know the hero so they ask, "What's the story?" There is no story. The Catholic Church has not done a quick shuffle with her doctrine just to favor a prominent gangster. The only thing different in Mike Machine Gun's case is the size of the electric bulb. He just happened to die under a spotlight, that's all . . . the white glare of publicity picked him up receiving the Sacraments, but any other Catholic properly disposed would have received the same Sacraments!

Put it another way. Is there

any man who dare say when another man may not return to God or from this point on, it is too late, and you must stay on the dead-end street of despair? That was the thought of Judas, not of Jesus. With Him, as long as there is life, there is hope. The sinner may be dyed-in-the-wool, but as long as he is not dead, he is a prospect for Paradise. And why should anyone be scandalized that there are great sinners in the church, when if there were not, Christ would stand branded as a liar! Didn't He compare His church to a net containing all kinds of fish, both good and bad; to a field where the wheat and the weeds would grow up side by side? And, by the way, didn't He Himself take the outstretched hand of a dying criminal, and draw him up to Heaven? We call him the Good Thief, but we forget that up until a few minutes before he died, he was a felon and a public enemy, dying the death of a murderer. His life was finished. Like a letter, it was written, folded, inserted in the envelope, about to be sealed. But now when it comes to sending it off, at the last moment he writes for the address not Hell but Heaven. He had sinned; he was sorry; and at his side the Savior whispers,

"This very day thou shalt be with me in Paradise!"

Granted that this Good Thief's faith may have been somewhat exceptional, and his sorrow somewhat extraordinary, does it not still prove that with God all things are possible? If not, then when a headstrong boy leaves home, takes the trail of the prodigal son, hugs to his heart the husks of sin—if in spite of all this, he cannot somehow be saved in the end, then let all you good mothers who pray each night for your straying boy, get up off your knees, and give up your praying! That perhaps shocks you. But aren't you forgetting that Mike Machine Gun's mother may have worn out her knees and cried out her eyes, praying that he would come back to God? Will you deny to her boy what you would want for your own?

So let's not be harsh and judge the death-bed repentance of Mike Machine Gun. But even more, let's not be foolish and imitate it. Suppose he did have a Funeral Mass, and a glittering funeral, with a bronze casket now instead of a steel vest, and celebrities for pall-bearers, and the longest line of limousines winding out to the cemetery. People have left before, are leaving ev-

ery day with great pomp—for hell. About him specifically, we do not know, and until Judgment Day never shall.

All you can say about any death-bed repentance is that it is possible. A theologian or a philosopher would defend that to the last ditch; but only a fool would want to risk it for himself. Because normally, doesn't a death-bed repentance seem like eating the apple of life and then generously flinging God the core? Flipping at the feet of God a cigarette stub, after the years you should have given Him have gone up in smoke? On his death-bed, is the sinner really abandoning sin, or is the ability to sin abandoning him? "I detest all my sins" — oh what a miracle of grace he needs to detest what all his life he has loved! "I firmly resolve to sin no more" —but if at that moment the nurse came in with ten more years of life on a tray, would he go back to sin for another nine and 99/100 years? God knows and God judges.

And suppose the man grown grey in sin does have true sorrow in the end. But suppose too that in that same hospital, at that moment, in the very room next to him, there dies a holy

nun, grown old in the service of God, a life of sacrifice and service behind her — do you think that both souls shall go streaking off together to the same joys of Heaven? I'm afraid that Mike Machine Gun's train would have a rather long stop-over on a very uncomfortable side-track called Purgatory.

However, let's be charitable, and not judge death-bed conversions. But above all let's be wise

and not bank on one. It isn't easy when you are old and your muscles are stiff to do a somersault or a backflip — especially from sin to virtue. And if we could, how do we know we shall have the chance. The God who always promises forgiveness, never promises even tomorrow to ask for it. And people who figure on coming back to God at the eleventh hour, generally die at half-past ten. God bless you!

THE WINTER OF LIFE

Address delivered on April 22, 1951

Modern Paganism attacks life at both ends. It is difficult to be born because of Birth Control, and easier to die because of Euthanasia. And when Paganism thus slams the front door against the Child timidly trying to enter the world, and pushes the old man, before his time, out the back door, the rooting section of Paganism lifts its old cheer, "Survival of the Strong!" On the other hand, Christianity has always quietly consecrated itself to the help and protection of the weak, whether they be in their first or second childhood. To that end it has its orphan asylums for the young and its homes for the aged — but some social workers tell us that today, when it comes to taking care of their own old father or mother, many young people, otherwise almost pious, have callouses on their hearts.

Well, it's true we of 1951 dwell in a distant valley of time, but there still comes rumbling down from Mount Sinai the thunder of the Fourth Commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother!" Unfortunately we learned

about that in grade school. And even though at times we grumbled and balked, we still could see it was reasonable. To obey, well that was O.K., but when the lesson droned on that we were supposed to support our parents in their old age, to provide them with food and clothing and shelter and medicine and spiritual assistance — why that went over our heads like the air mail. We were wondering what Mom would have ready for lunch. Our busy and bustling mother didn't seem to need any help. Not then. Maybe she does need it now. And the obligation to support our parents which we took so lightly when we were nine, still binds heavily whether we are twenty-nine or thirty-nine.

After all, they provided for you for many years when you could not provide for yourself. Why shouldn't you do as much for them now? Maybe they are a care. . . and tie you down? Don't you think you were a care, and tied them down, when you were young? Perhaps they are cranky or crochety now and then; so were you, unless as a

child you were the angelic exception. Maybe they upset your routine a little; you used to upset their whole house. And do you know, their whole life faced toward you, toward welcoming you into the world and making you comfortable when you came? Don't you think you could do a little toward making their life comfortable as they get ready to leave?

I don't imagine it is easy to be old. I remember once hearing a young girl pouting and whining because she thought her home supervision was too strict. It wasn't, actually. But the girl flared up and said, "The trouble with you, Mother, is you don't *want* me to have a good time!" "Good time!" said the mother. "Sit down, Citronella. You talk about me keeping you from good times. Did you ever think about the good times you keep me from? You know, it would be a whole lot easier to forget all about you. Some day you are going to learn that being a mother is a whole lot harder than being a daughter. It's work, and it's worry."

And sometimes I wonder if being a grandmother may not be even harder than being a mother. Oh not from the score of

work or worry, but indifference, neglect, suffering. After all, to be a grown woman, and an older woman, in a younger woman's house — say, your daughter-in-law, and to be definitely secondary and always in the background — don't you think that hurts? To feel as you grow older more like a boarder and less like a relative; to be a mother-in-law but not *in love*—oh, if there is one word I would gladly rip out of the dictionary, it is that word, mother-in-law! Doesn't it seem to imply and to insinuate an unwelcome meddling stranger? Well, on second thought, maybe too many of them do meddle. Maybe at the marriage ceremony, we should have something like the solemn cutting of an apron string, to symbolize that henceforth just as man and wife are joined, mother and son must part — in the sense: that henceforth the best mother in the world has to be a distinct second in the life of her married son. The girl he chose was not good enough for him, of course — what girl would be? But, once he has "thrown himself away," and has given his hand and heart to the girl of his choice, a real mother never interferes.

Some mothers are so deter-

mined not to interfere that they deliberately live alone. Some prefer it because, though they reared a noisy brood of their own, now when they are no longer cushioned by youth, they wince at the shrill voices and stamping feet of the grandchildren. There are many old mothers like this, living in little rooms, all alone. Well in this situation, do you think it is enough if a son or daughter mail them a few dollars every month? Surely they deserve more than mere support. They are not old police horses turned out to pasture. They are mothers. They are hungry for other things than food — hungry for a little affection, a little visit, a little remembrance, a little love. And mark you, all this is not sentimental charity. This is our solemn, bounden duty. It is the adult part of the Fourth Commandment!

I don't think I have to add that it holds for fathers too. Yet personally I have come across a case where they forced an old Dad to take his meals in the cellar. In that house they treated the dog better than the Dad. Oh it must be the very worst feeling in the world to realize that somebody you live with thinks you are a burden, and will be relieved and happy when you do the decent

thing and die. I think that God will see to it that we are treated when we are old, pretty much as we treated others. And it's not too long away. Every old person we see is the first rough proofs of our own picture a few years hence. Every baby carriage coming along the sidewalk says, "Get out of my way! Here I come!" Do you remember the story of the sturdy Bavarian peasant who got disgusted with his father because the trembling old man, carrying his plate away from the table after dinner, had broken two plates in the last month? Don't ask me why he had to carry the plate away; the farmer wanted him to carry it and not break it. So this day when the old man dropped it, the farmer swore at him, and went out into a nearby forest, and began to carve a plate out of wood. Seems his own little son had tagged along after him, and got interested and asked his Dad what he was making. "I'm making a plate that that clumsy old grandfather of yours won't be able to break!" The boy watched his father whittling away, and then he said, "Daddy, be sure you make that plate good and strong, because then when you are old, I can give it to you!" Daddy almost cut his finger

when he heard that. He looked at the boy, looked into space, tossed the plate back into the woods, and said, "Come on, son, let's see how Grandpa's doing."

Practically the last words Our Blessed Lord preached from the pulpit of the cross was when He rolled His blood-rimmed eyes toward Mary, and said to St. John, "Son, behold thy Mother!" as if to say, "Be good to her, take care of her, when I am gone." The eyes of Christ still look lovingly on those who are good to their parents *before they are gone!* For example, often it is a daughter who gives up her own motherhood to take care of her mother. And in return the world is pretty cruel toward her, pinning on her the label of old maid, as though she were only a remnant left there on the bargain counter of life after the rush was over. . . a spinster. . . an old maid. They forget that once she was a young blooming maid with an old fading mother. They forget that when her generation walked up the aisle to the pulsing boom of the Wedding March, she wasn't left behind: she stayed behind. Yes, she is a spinster, maybe now and then she spins dreams of what might have been; but all the time she is spinning out of herself care and

comfort for an old parent who needs it.

And for the young and vigorous that isn't always easy. Most people love old folks at a romantic distance. They think of the sad beauty of an old face, the gleaming silver of the hair, the gentle manners of a by-gone day. Meaning they like old age in charming little poems or in character actors in the movies. But that's like liking a snow-storm through a comfortable picture window. To live with the foibles, crotchets and the eccentricities of the old is another matter, like—well all the way from a hand cupped suspiciously to the ear, to a noisy way of taking soup as though there were an outboard motor on the spoon. Especially it isn't easy when the old person is an invalid, so confined by walls and window-panes that she is restless; so crippled by pain she is cranky; so helpless to do anything herself that she wants everything done at once and perfectly! Show me the girl, the daughter who cares for a parent like that; a girl who spends all day patiently answering each petulant call, and who is all honey to an invalid who is sometimes all hornet; who takes her mother's thin arm as she hobbles

down toward the sunset, when she might have slipped her arm into some man's and headed toward the sunrise of a new life of her own—a girl whose brothers and sisters are married off and have their families, a girl who perhaps is just as pitied as Aunt Peg or Aunt Sue—well, I don't think God pities her. I think he loves her dearly and will reward her richly. Maybe she is not a saint; maybe her picture is only on a piano instead of up in a stained-glass window; maybe her name is in a letter box instead of in a litany, but she belongs to those martyrs not of

blood, but of blood-relationship, who do not lay down their lives but who give them up! That God who loves old people like old books, old books that were tossed around so much in their time they are battered and faded and falling to pieces, and now up on the shelf, ignored; that God who loves them, these precious first editions, and sends his angels to collect them for Heaven, He will write high in His own Book of Life, the Catalogue of Heaven, those who appreciated and valued and cared for the treasure they had, their own old mother or father. God bless you!

THE FLAG OF CHRISTIAN COURAGE

Address delivered on April 29, 1951

When I was in the Seminary twenty-five years ago, three or four of us used to meet every week in the Lower Chapel and practice speaking. We would preach to one another and thereby strengthen our voices, and then we would listen to one another and thereby strengthen our patience. Being very young we wrote pretty flamboyantly, and every sentence pranced along flaring its adjectives like jockey silks. Being very young too, we walked among the mountain peaks of high ideals, not knowing much at all about "this valley of tears," the world of reality where people lived and loved, and had their headaches and their heartaches, and worked and suffered and died.

All this came back to me a couple of weeks ago when I opened an old book, and out fluttered one of those forgotten youthful sermons. Reading it now was like finding a picture of yourself as an altar boy. Apparently the Feast of Christ the King had just been added, like a new campaign ribbon, to the calendar of the church, and this particular sermon was a salute to that oc-

casion. Talk about rhetoric and decoration — every paragraph was painted like the Book of Kells. It was more like a stained glass window than a sermon. I had Christ, the King, up there on an Ivory Throne, amid the waving of purple banners and the blaring of silver trumpets, and all the races of mankind like different-colored rivers, came streaming past the Throne to pay Him homage. Prominent in the picture was a Crusader, blood upon his armor and a broken sword in his hand, a warrior for Christ the King. An early Christian too, a smile wreathing his lips, going gaily forth to meet the bounding lions, a martyr for Christ the King. Not to mention the foreign missionary, courageous blackrobe amid the green palms and the brown natives of a tropical island, holding aloft his cross, a courier of Christ the King. And of course, a saintly nun, immaculate lily growing in the garden of the cloister, the princess of Christ the King.

In a way, I suppose, it was all beautiful and true, but again as remote as a stained-glass window to the people kneeling down there

in the pews. You see, in the Seminary we lived on a little island of innocence in the midst of the rough and bitter waters of the world. We were barricaded behind book-cases. Our skyline was steeple and tower and dome and the rolling ridges of distant hills. We read no newspapers. No Secular magazines. We heard no radio. Being members of a Religious order, we came home once in six years, for not quite four days, after we were ordained. So the world outside was just about a sad rumor. Sin was something in the textbooks. Suffering was something in the Lives of the Saints.

I am not saying that this is a bad preparation for a priest. I think it is good. As a matter of fact, it is just an elaboration of the forty days Christ spent on the mountain-top in meditation and prayer and communing with His Heavenly Father before He came down to preach. But it is still true that when we came out and at the first step stubbed our toe against hard reality, we winced with the shock. Well, you got over the shock, but you would never preach a sermon like that on Christ the King again. He was still your King, only now you knew Him better—and His followers. Henceforth to you His

crown would be thorns, and His throne a cross, and in His Hands not a scepter but a nail and a wound. And His heroes and heroines would not be dramatic figures in picturesque costume. They would be, and they are, the little people in the small print whom the world never hears about; heroic but unsung; not the crusaders in their castles, but the common people in their kitchens; not shouting dramatically, "Long Live Christ the King!" but whispering, yes, and perhaps sobbing those hard, hard words, "Thy Will be done!"

The other day I met a postman coming down the street, whistling like the very spirit of spring. We stopped and chatted for a moment, and I turned into the gate of the house he had just left. Would you believe it, already there was a tear on the letter he had delivered two minutes before? I saw it when she handed me the letter, the letter that brought the details of how her boy had been killed in Korea. And as I tried to console her, I saw the postman on the other side of the street now, ringing doorbells and dropping letters, his brown bag jouncing against his side. Oh, that bag carried some good news no doubt, but it bulged with more than its share

of bad. Bills that cannot be paid, taxes that cannot be met, this envelope with a crushing hospital report, and that one a failure at school, and another one regrets that there is no position available at present, but if in the future—

Every postman's bag is heavy with heartaches delivered right to the door, life's little unknown tragedies. Every rectory parlor echoes the same sad stories day after day. Every votive candle burning before a shrine, tells the same tales in the language of light and shadow. When you see a candle burning like that before a shrine, never think it is just a pious decoration. Every holy candle waving in the dusk is like a little golden flag waving over a battlefield where some soul is hard-pressed in the fight. Every bright candle is a blazing flare leaping up from a sinking ship. Every nervous flame is a moving tongue of fire calling, "Help! Help!"

Sometimes the trouble is so overwhelming, the situation so apparently hopeless, and we so helpless, that we just feel like burying our head in our arms and almost crying. With some people, especially at the first impact of sorrow, this is understandable. But to stay that way

for a long time, to be always despondent, in chronic despair—where is the virtue of Fortitude (as the theologians call it) or plain Christian Courage? Whom do you think Our Lord loves the more, the sniffling, pouting self-pitier, or the person who quietly takes it on the chin, or even on both chins? Once, the test of Christian Courage was pouring out one's blood; now the test might be not shedding tears. Peculiar thing here: each of us thinks that his trouble is greater than anybody else's. If you ever feel that way, a good rebuttal is a walk through the nearest hospital. If after that you don't come running down the hospital steps, thanking God that you can run, your sense of values are off-center. None of us has any monopoly on trouble. There is plenty to go around. There always has been. And besides the obvious one of prayer, the only antidote is Fortitude, Courage!

And yet sometimes people will light a candle (as we mentioned before) and then go back to their pew, and as they gaze at the sweet, serene face of the Madonna, a bitter, rebellious feeling wants to break through their lips: "Mother of God, it is well enough for you to be so primly

pious up there, sheltered and quietly happy in your Shrine! But you don't know what it is to be responsible for a struggling family, to provide for them day after day—do you remember that you must eat before you can pray?" Does she remember? How could she forget? *We* forget, for example, her flight into Egypt when the Holy Family were refugees, and Joseph trying to get a job in a foreign country and not knowing a word of the language! Don't you think those days needed courage flying like a flag?

Or a young man might kneel before Our Lady's picture and try to choke back the thoughts that rise within him, "Forgive me, Mary, but I don't think you know what it's all about. Oh it's easy for you to be so immaculate and chaste and saintly there in your picture frame. But I don't live in a picture frame. I live out in the world. How can you know what it means to try to be good when everything around seems bad, to keep a clean tongue in your mouth when so many tongues about you are dripping with slime, to hold on to those Ten Commandments till your hands are raw and bleeding, when so many others have let go, and are boasting of

their freedom, and taunting you with being too strict—oh it isn't easy serving God out past the church doors!" And Mary listens sympathetically, but there is a far away look in her eyes. She is still thinking of her sojourn as a young mother in Egypt—Egypt where there were no Ten Commandments, and where god was an obscene carving multiplied a hundred times over, and where vice was a virtue, and men and women went singing merrily down the road to hell—only there was no hell, because when you died, your body became a mummy, and your soul went drifting off into a beetle or a bee. Don't you think that to live for God in an atmosphere of utter paganism meant the highest kind of courage?

Nobody who ever served God ever served Him long, without courage! Courage sat in the prow of Pere Marquette's canoe as it swerved round each new bend of the river, as he dared to bring the faith to hostile Indians. Courage steadied the fingers of Father Damien as he wound his bandages round the leprous sores of the walking ghosts on the grey island of Molokai. Courage filtered through the tiny barred window in the Tower of London as St. Thomas

More knelt for the last time on the stone floor beside his bed, before he laid his head on the hard pillow of the headsman's block.

But these are headline figures and we were talking about the postman's bag and ordinary people and the tragedies and the courage in little lives. Often it takes more courage to meet disaster in your own living room than it does for some national hero in his hour of crisis. Because in your ordeal there is no dramatic setting to remind you that everyone is looking; no electric excitement to make you forget danger and lift you above yourself; no thought of thundering applause when it is all over. Nobody but yourself or your family will ever know.

Who is courageous? I will tell you. Courageous is the mother who keeps her home going despite a husband who is a drunkard, and for the harm he does that home were almost better dead than just dead drunk. Courageous is the man who on his job silently swallows insults and abuse, not because he is afraid of the boss, but because he needs that job for his family. Courageous are those who sincerely go on striving to serve God, though they sometimes fall, even

though the world hangs round their neck the sign "Hypocrite." Courageous are those who go on praying when no answer comes back and their prayers seem to go into a dark empty tunnel, and Heaven seems to be a wall of brass; because in God's own way, in God's own day, the answer will come. Courageous is the wife who enters marriage as a virgin and remains in it as a martyr for the sake of her little ones, and in spite of a husband who even taunts her to her face about another woman. No matter where such a wife lives, whether it is the slums or the suburbs, the address is Calvary, and Christ the King recognizes the vinegar and *the gall*, and the kiss of a Judas that mocks and betrays. Courageous are those people who have come to know how bereavement can empty the heart of happiness overnight like an empty cup, but comfort and resignation are slow to trickle in—people who may have lost a loved one in cruel circumstances but do not therefore lose faith! People who have humbly stretched out their arms to embrace the cross, and find that their arms are around the Crucified Himself . . . for from His wounds come the *transfusion* for our courage! God bless you.

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.

127 CATHOLIC HOUR STATIONS

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	Lima.....	WLOK	1240 kc
	Toledo.....	WSPD*	1340 kc
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Oregon.....	Medford.....	KMED	1440 kc
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(Revised as of March 6, 1949)

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