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# DISTINGUISHED SERVANTS



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Rev. John M. McCarthy  
The Hour of Faith



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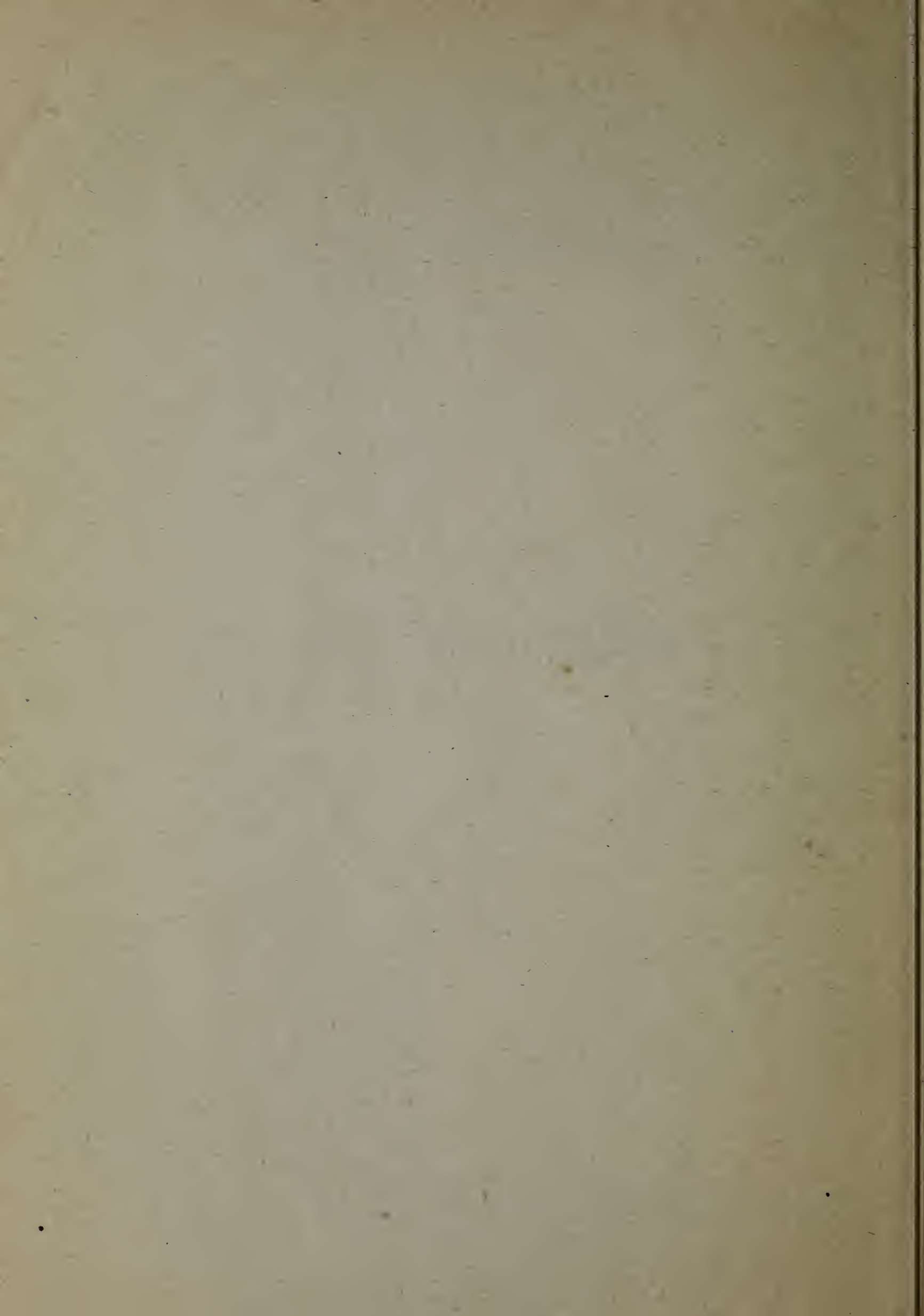
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**DISTINGUISHED SERVANTS**



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A series of Sunday morning talks given in 1945 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

REV. JOHN M. McCARTHY

Mission Band of the Archdiocese of Chicago



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## SUCCESS STORY

Talk Given On December 2, 1945

Suppose you suddenly found yourself seated on a stage as one of the contestants in a quiz program. This is your question: "Since the decoration was begun in 1862, how many heroes have been awarded the Congressional Medal of honor?" What would you answer? Actually there have been only 2966.

It is quite astonishing that the number is so small, relatively only a handful, compared with the many millions in the service. These decorations, of course, in no way detract from the honor and the debt of national gratitude due to every member of the armed forces, who stayed on the job and helped to purchase victory in any American crisis. The smallness of the number of heroes does, however, emphasize their honor; it makes them and their deeds very exclusive.

In the Catholic Church we have had for a long time a somewhat similar system of citation and decoration. Our counterpart of the awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor is the process of canonization, and the awarding of the title "Saint." This Catholic citation of distin-

guished service is never made till after death. In fact the underlying purpose is to give us a guarantee that a certain person, a noble or a beggar, a doctor or a gardener, a blacksmith or a scholar, whatever the case may be, having lived an exceptionally good life, is now unquestionably in heaven. After we have this assurance we are prompted to imitate the saint's earthly life and to seek the intercession of this friend of God.

We do not permit veneration of a saint to interfere with adoration of God; our reverence for any saint is far different from our worship of God. It is not merely a lesser degree of reverence; it is of a different type. A saint's holiness is only a reflection of God's holiness. Augustine, in the 4th century (who, by the way, was later declared a saint) explained our practice very clearly by saying that Catholics, while giving to God alone adoration strictly so called, honor the saints because of the divine graces which have earned them eternal life and through which they reign with God in heaven as His chosen friends.

I emphasize this difference between worship of God and veneration of the saints because sometimes those who are not entirely acquainted with our insistence on this distinction are taken aback by our devotion to the saints. Let it be clear that our appeal is always to God. When we pray for example, to Saint Anthony, it is to beg his intercession with God on our behalf. He is one of God's special friends and shall be for all eternity. We believe that when saints present our requests to God, He frequently honors them by bestowing special favors on men.

The canonization of a man or woman does not make the saint; the saint is already made. The Church's action is a solemn declaration of fact. Many saints are never canonized, but they are saints just the same.

So we naturally ask: And when does the saint become a saint? What is there about, let us say, Saint Philip Neri which makes his life different from anybody else's life? The answer is simple though comprehensive: a saint relates his life to God more thoroughly than others. Before he can relate his life to God, he must know God. A saint then is a normal being like you or me,

walking the earth, who comes to a superior knowledge and awareness of God and makes this knowledge function in all his actions. His finding God is not like the *eureka* of a man with a flashlight who discovers a jewel in the grass at night; rather it is like the discovery of a man who awakens on a brilliant morning to find all creation bathed in sunlight. A saint finds God permeating everything in the world; he becomes conscious of the "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and throughout all, and in us all" (*Ephesians* 4:6).

A striking example of this is found in Saint Francis of Assisi. We all know of his love of nature, his preaching to the birds, his delight to walk on flower-swept hills. While not all saints expressed themselves so vividly as did Saint Francis yet every saint views the world as the beautiful product of Divine Power. Even a holy hermit like Simeon or a cenobite like Maur, in renouncing the world for solitude, though fleeing the sensualities of man which often make for ugliness, is also dispossessing himself of the legitimate good things in the world. It is his very consciousness of their goodness which makes his renunciation a real sacrifice.

The saint like Jerome, Augustine, or Thomas Aquinas may be a scholar and as such can prove the existence of God, but as a saint his knowledge of God is more than a conclusion of logic; it is a reality as vivid as his own life. Or he may be unlettered, perhaps unable to read or write, but his belief in God is none the less sturdy and constant.

Without disturbing in any way his expansive view of all creation as the handiwork of God, the second mark of a saint is that he enjoys the sublime concentration of his belief and his love in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God became man so that men might draw near to Him; the saint values this friendship with our Lord as more important than earthly life or health or worldly honor. And so have martyrs—hundreds and thousands of martyrs. They loved life at least as much as you or I. But they loved Christ more than life or anything that life could offer. Christ was number one to them, all else had to take second place. In this love for Christ, no saint has ever been quite satisfied that he had reached his goal. In all humility his dissatisfaction with himself is far greater than that of the astronomer who counts a

million stars but knows there are countless more. The saint is imitating Christ the Son of God. He knows he shall never match the Master; his ever restless ambition is to approach the Pattern more perfectly.

The third mark of a saint is the one most obvious to the world: he loves and serves his fellowman. Sometimes, in fact, this characteristic is the only one observed by unthinking men; and when it alone is noted, it becomes pitifully misunderstood. For example, Saint Vincent de Paul's love for humanity is genuine but his horizon must not be narrowed to mere philanthropy. His benefactions to mankind are but an overflow of his love for God. He who would overlook this motive, no matter how complimentary he may try to be, is certainly guilty of the proverbial error of judging a book by its cover. To describe a saint merely as a great humanitarian is to overlook that which makes him a saint, namely, his motive. The saint loves God. He tries to imitate the Son of God, Jesus. He takes literally the words of Our Lord: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me" (*Matthew* 25:40). It was the consuming

personal love for Jesus that sent a homesick Francis Xavier plodding across continents carrying the knowledge of his Master. The same love ordered the hands of Don Bosco, juggling and doing acrobatics for his delighted youthful audience; he was not a Pied Piper merely leading children from danger; he led them *from* danger all right, but he led them *to* Christ.

It is very difficult for us to grasp the depth of love the Saints had for our Lord, the union of their spirit with His Spirit. Admirable as is a soldier-hero risking death, crawling over bullet-riddled paths to save a wounded pal, this heroic sacrifice can scarcely hold a candle to a saint's devoting his life to the rescue of his fellow men. The soldier's act is grand; the saint's whole life is grand.

Like the one who would call a saint an altruist or a humanitarian, I too would be guilty of grave omission if I failed to mention the badge of a saint which,

though invisible, is the very root of his prowess. The saint is the possessor of a divine gift which we call supernatural grace. The saints all accomplished a super-human amount of work, whether it was teaching or evangelizing, or nursing or doing penance or praying for mankind. But never call him a human dynamo, as though he generated tremendous energy by sheer strength of his own will. To pursue the comparison, rather he is a motor that stays constantly connected with the power supply of God's grace. His drive is not for his own success, or his own fame, much less his own comfort. In fact he seeks personal humiliation and self-abnegation, to make sure he is seeking only the success of his Master. The ultimate to be reached, the very acme of his ambition, the be-all and end-all of a saint's breathless yearning is to be able with Saint Paul to say, "It is now no longer I that live but Christ lives in me" (*Galatians* 2:20).

## MOST HONORED SERVANT

Talk Given On December 9, 1945

What is the most beautiful picture you ever saw?

The most beautiful picture in my recollection, I saw shortly before the war. I was in Paris and I visited the famed art gallery of the Louvre.

In those days Europe was filled with American tourists, and of course a certain percentage of these were constantly filing in and out of this world-renowned museum. I moved along, in fact I was almost swept along with the hasty concourse, impatient to see everything at once. Some carried their guide books and would pause a scant few seconds before a masterpiece to consult and check it off the list as "having been seen." As I ascended a staircase to the second floor, I became aware that above was an area of greater reverence and quiet. There in a large salon were perhaps 100 people. Some were seated on little rented chairs; others stood erect with folded arms. There was no milling about, no restlessness. Some looked to be artists; others, the curious tourists. All attention was centered upon one painting; a picture of a lovely girl. She

was standing on a cloud, her hands were folded on her breast. Her full-flowing robes seemed scarcely to be fashioned but rather hovered about her as though undrawn by gravity. The faintest blush was in her cheek; a slightest undefined nimbus about her hair. Murillo's "Immaculate Conception." I tarried for a long time as did the others, and only with reluctance did we leave. And the thought that lingered in my mind is undoubtedly the same thought that poses as a question to anyone who takes even a passing interest in art: Why are there so many Madonnas? Why were the great masters at their greatest when they turned to Mary? Michelangelo, Raphael, Murillo, Fra Angelico, Van Dyck, seemed never so inspired as when they attempted artistic justice to our Blessed Lady.

The same pattern unfolds in the other arts. I am told that many authorities consider Michelangelo's "Pieta" the most beautiful statue ever liberated from a block of marble. Certainly in music some of the world's most enchanting melodies have

been composed to accompany the Angel's salutation to the humble handmaid of the Lord: *Ave Maria*. And in literature, hers is a position of charm; unending poetry and prose laud this lovely girl whose simple name is Mary. Why is she so favored? Why is poor fallen man inspired and capable of ecstatic heights when he contemplates the humble maid? The answer is so obvious and neat we pass it over usually and look for a reason more involved. But return to the obvious, for there is the truth: Mary shines out like the moon at a midnight crest because God wanted it to be so.

Back in the uncalendared aeons of eternity the Divine Mind who is God, in fixity upon the Incarnation, could have chosen for His Mother anyone of the noble and lovely women who have graced this world. He could have chosen the courageous Flavia Domitilla; or the innocent, firm-willed Little Flower; or an Elizabeth of Hungary, she of the abounding charity. Not confined by our horizons of time and place, He could have chosen for His mother the lovely princess who inspired the Taj Mahal. He could have selected any one of the millions of self-sacrificing, wholesome mothers who have

made their estate the universal shrine of all ages. But none of these was quite good enough to be the Mother of Christ. So He made Mary according to a unique divine plan; and she is the fairest of the fair. It is because of the endowments of loveliness bestowed upon her by God, that Mary holds such a sublime position in man's vault into ethereal artistry.

But God was not content that she should have surpassing charm only of a physical nature; He conferred on her a spiritual privilege in virtue of which the Angel Gabriel hailed her: "Full of Grace." One of the most famous tributes in English literature to this brilliant jewel in Mary's crown of honor is in Wordsworth's Sonnet to the Virgin:

"Woman! above all women  
glorified,  
Our tainted nature's solitary  
boast."

The Catholic Church teaches us that we come into this world bearing on our souls the guilt of original sin. But the Blessed Virgin, in view of the fact that she was to be the Mother of Jesus, Son of God, was from the first instant of her conception preserved from original sin. We do not say there was anything



miraculous about her conception in the natural order; rather this honor is supernatural. We say that God, for whom all things are present, reached across the years to the merits of Christ on Calvary, carried them back in time and applied them to Mary at the very moment of the union of her soul to her body. Thus by Divine Power Mary was preserved from sin at the very instant her life began.

We would think perhaps that because of these special gifts, Mary was swept beyond the realm of voluntary choice.

The whole system of God's grace is such a manifestation of divine power that it often wraps itself in mystery. But let this be clear: No matter the abundance of His helping grace, God does not destroy free will. In matters of personal life Mary was free to choose between right and wrong. She chose the right—but it was a free choice. Even regarding her motherhood of Jesus, she was free, undeniably free. When the Angel announced to her that she was to be the Mother of the Most High, Mary could not understand how this great honor was in accord with the vow of perpetual virginity she had already made. Whereupon the Angel assured her that:

“The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God” (*Luke 1:35*). Being thus assured of God's will, yet of her own free choice, Mary said: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word” (*Luke 1:38*). That was her choice, and in it was magnificent surrender to God. There were no strings attached, no conditions to be met, no promises to be guaranteed. Be it done! How familiar, how closely akin to Christ in Gethsemani: Thy will be done! Mary was agreeing to everything involved. By her own free will she agreed to Bethlehem; she did not foresee it; but her surrender was complete: Be it done. By her own free will, came the flight into Egypt. By her will, the thirty happy years of Nazareth. “Be it done” included His public life and her following from afar. Let Calvary come too, and her death vigil at His bleeding feet. And the cold body of her lifeless child hid behind a great stone door; be it done!

There you have a summary of a few of the thoughts that flood the mind when we view a picture of Mary. Only a picture! How

lovely she herself must be! But in spite of the dignity possessed by this most honored maid servant, preeminence that would tend to hollow a gulf between her and us, let it not be. She is ours; she is one of us. She is not divine; she is human. And she still comes a-begging for a gift and an honor which only we can give. It is the gift that every little child bestows upon his mother; and which a mother treasures beyond gold. It is the tribute of our helplessness. Never is the secret of a mother's heart so nearly told as when her child seeks safety in her arms. Mary became mother to all mankind, on Calvary. Christ's last bouquet to us from the Cross was this treasured Mother. We would do well as executors of His estate to pay her the childlike affection that is her due. How? Talk to her; call it prayer if you will.

Yesterday was the feast of Mary's preservation from original sin. It was celebrated throughout the Catholic world. But for us in America yesterday had a special meaning. More than 100 years ago the Catholic bishops of the United States chose Mary as our national patron saint under the title of her Immaculate Conception. As an

American Catholic I quote the tribute, beautiful in its simplicity, of Father Charles O'Donnell, late President of Notre Dame University:

Mary, the Mother of Jesus,  
A lady of high degree  
Sat by her cottage spinning  
In Nazareth of Galilee.

A light fell over her shoulders  
As she sat in the plane-tree's  
shade  
While a delicate lace of shadows  
The sun and the green leaves  
made.

Busy her foot on the treadle  
And her wheel busily whirled  
As a child looked out from the  
doorway,  
A child who had made the  
world.

Deftly she handled the distaff  
And happily whirred her wheel  
As the child came down from the  
doorway  
And ran to her side to kneel.

"Mother," He said, as He watch-  
ed her  
There while she sat and spun,  
"Some things are more fair than  
I dreamed them  
The night that I made the sun.

And you are my heart of all  
beauty,

My star of all seas, of all  
lands,—”

“Hush, Child!” whispered Mary  
His Mother,

Her tears falling down on His  
hands.\*

\*Quoted with permission of Ave  
Maria in which the poem originally  
appeared.

# UNDEFINED LEGION OF HONOR

Talk Given On December 16, 1945

Theatrical celebrities and military heroes and athletic stars—and saints—all have one thing in common. Each usually needs a good supporting cast. There are some exceptions to be sure.

We find occasionally a dramatic player so clever at monologue as to be able to present an entire performance alone. Now and again we read during the war of a soldier who received the title "one man army." In athletic contests where teams are involved, an individual may show such exceptional ability that the spectators will forget other members of the team. And sometimes you will find a saint who seemed to fix his aim, and lead his life, and make his eternal mark, with no help from anyone except God. But usually there is a supporting cast not in the range of the spotlight—or a ground crew, or a team, or a company of earnest co-workers.

Of course you know that I am not going to talk about actors or soldiers or athletes. I am going to talk about saints. But I make that point about teams and ground crews because today we turn the spotlight on the co-

workers and helpers of famous saints, and upon those countless good people who are quickly forgotten when they die.

Let us start with a saint whose supporting cast would have made a "supercolossal" motion picture look like a "one-night-stand" stock company: St. Vincent de Paul. He enlisted the aid of thousands of men and women in his far-flung works of charity. These followers and helpers caught his spirit, which was simply the spirit of Christ his model, and seem never to have refused any opportunity of charity: leper hospitals and founding asylums, teaching posts in seminaries or universities, chaplaincies for the military, for prisoners, for galley slaves. They followed his lead and never held back. One by one they died, known only to God, and others filled their ranks and still fill the ranks even in our present day.

Then there was St. Joseph Cottolengo. When I was in Italy I went out of my way to visit Turin and the famous House of Providence he established in

1832. In 1938 the House of Providence was living up to its name more than ever. There were about 10,000 patients: the sick, the blind, the deaf mutes; the incurable, the retarded, the imbeciles; orphans, aged, unwanted. It was not a house—it was a city, supported entirely by charity, with no endowments and no bank-books; just the day to day charity of the followers of Christ. 10,000 patients! And who took care of them? Hundreds of men and women, destined to die unknown except to God, who devoted their lives to these poor as a tribute to their Master. A great “supporting cast!”

Shall I go on telling about the helpers of the saints? I fear the pattern would become monotonous, for so many saints, who carried on great works of charity, were aided by countless unsung heroes. I do not wish to restrict the term “helpers” only to those self-sacrificing men and women who gave themselves completely to the saints’ programs of charity; not only to those who became priests or brothers or nuns, taking vows which bound them for a lifetime to the cause. Rather I would keep also in view generosity gave much more than those cooperators who by their

the lauded cup of cold water in Christ’s name.

Some time ago I was invited to conduct a day of recollection at a certain convent. It was not for the nuns but for a group of women. It was to be the Mother Superior’s gesture of thanks to these good ladies for the help they had given in the work of the nuns. Now I have long since admired beyond words the charitable deeds of these nuns; but at the same time, from a very practical viewpoint, I wondered how they were able to carry on. It looked like all “outgo” and no income. But that day of recollection solved the problem very clearly, for here were the charitable people behind the scenes who made the sisters’ work possible. Some were women obviously of means, and the good sisters in going to the sick and the destitute became dispensers of charity placed in their hands. Some were women of very moderate circumstances who gave of their time and ability to organize, to sew, and to interest others. I know that the Church does not canonize anyone before death; but we, in the face of virtue, sometimes hallow living people, and in a wide sense of the term, we call them saints. In this wide sense, these nuns are

saints and I am sure our Lord will not overlook their "supporting cast."

Lest perchance I am placing too much emphasis on works of external charity let us retrace our steps to the solid ground of balanced Catholic truth. Here are a few facts. The Catholic Church now and again grants the weight of her authority to a guarantee that a certain person, having lived a life of extraordinary holiness, is now in heaven. This process called canonization includes a very careful examination of the person's life. After the fact of holiness is determined, the Church makes her solemn pronouncement. The whole procedure is but a particular application of one of Christianity's first principles, namely: when a person dies in a state of true friendship with God, he shall be God's friend forever. Because heaven is a supernatural reward, it is beyond our natural power to earn it. We need a super-natural power, a gift from God which is called sanctifying grace.

We shall resort to a comparison for a better understanding of this profound truth. Suppose I wish to break down an atom. I may wish to accomplish this with all my heart. I can think

about it, plan it, hope for it, and strive absurdly to do it by pressing my fingers together or gritting my teeth with all my strength. But I need something more than my natural physical power; I need a cyclotron—an atom-smashing machine.

In a somewhat similar way, I may be moved by God to wish for heaven with all my heart, to think about it, hope for it. But I would be very foolish to strive to get there by purely natural powers. Heaven is beyond my natural earning power. I must first receive from God supernatural grace. When I possess this supernatural "tool", then all the good actions of my life help to purchase my supernatural reward which is heaven.

We receive this supernatural power in baptism. We increase it by the other sacraments. If we lose it by committing serious sin, it can be restored through God's mercy in the sacrament of penance. A person who dies possessing this badge of true friendship for God will remain God's friend forever in heaven.

If all of this seems complicated or not in accord with the vague, easy hope of salvation of many in our day, we should keep in mind that this straightforward

plan was instituted by Christ for us. If we desire the reward we should be willing to accept the means to achieve it. Jesus Himself said: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing" (*John 15:4-5*).

Now there are undoubtedly countless souls who depart this life in a state of real friendship for God; possessors of His sanctifying grace who appreciated this supernatural gift and lived according to God's commands. The Church does not attempt to study all their lives in order to declare them saints. She chooses a very few, of extraordinary virtue, in order that we may have their practical example and their effective intercession with our heavenly Father. But the Church goes farther in reminding us of the vast legion of others who have reached the goal and enjoy eternal happiness. The Church pays her homage to this great army on the feast of All Saints.

In this magnificent cavalcade are the millions of good, plain

people, who filled their span of earthly years faithful to our Lord. They were not heroic saints; sometimes perhaps they failed, maybe did serious wrong. But they went back before too late and made amends to the Master's merciful Heart. They died His friends. Within the happy ranks are the numbered little ones who died in baptismal innocence, His special friends, for of such is His Kingdom. And I think there must be a very honored regiment—the helpers of the saints—under His banner of charity. And there will be the lads whose names are beginning already to fade on the little white crosses all over the world—but what matter, be their names inscribed in His unchanging Heart?

Life is strange, is it not? So filled with aims short of the goal. So filled with the hopeful strife that attempts to turn this vale of tears into Paradise—always failing but ever scornful of those who would be defeatist. We are only on the stairs, between two doors—and both doors are death. But if we climb, *if we climb*, our hands, like children's hidden within Christ's guiding, helping clasp, **IF WE BUT CLIMB**—beyond that upper door is the undefined legion of honor.

# THE BIRTHDAY OF SANCTITY

Talk Given On December 23, 1945

Last Thursday afternoon I was downtown, here in Chicago. What a crowd! You would think that everybody in the middle-west decided to go shopping at one time: children by the thousand, excited and wide-eyed, pulling their mothers to one display window, then another; perplexed men wondering what to buy; tired clerks doing their best to be pleasant and patient; street cars clanging, autos and trucks mooing through the traffic; little tots timidly whispering to street corner Santas; women carrying packages and happily searching for more; holly wreaths on the lamp posts, and colored lights everywhere; and from the loud speakers along the street, Bing crooning *Silent Night*.

It sounds a bit frightening, does it not? But on the contrary, it was delightful. Perhaps you are amazed at my saying that. I know there are some good people who are quite provoked at all the commercialism connected with Christmas. And of course I admit, it is a real tragedy if Christmas be for some no more than a bit of tinsel and the exchange of

a few gifts. But for the sake of the many to whom the jingling bells and tissue paper and red ribbons are but a preparation for a birthday party in honor of our Blessed Lord, for their sake all the store and street decorations are both commended and justified. Most assuredly if you would have Christmas at all it must be more than a few span-gles and festoons; but Christmas without these externals would scarcely express the joy which this feast so uniquely kindles in human hearts.

The joy of Christmas is in a class by itself, akin to, yet quite distinct from, all other gladness. It is a joy begotten of faith, born of hope, and forever espoused to charity. Without charity it is nothing; without faith and hope it is like a holiday gift box all done up in gay wrappings but containing a useless trinket. Some, who greatly anticipate Christmas, go disappointed with the meager joy it brings to them, for in their plans they attempt to make it a time of mere joviality and merry-making. The joy of Christmas is unique in that it



is inseparably bound up with pathos, and small wonder, for there is something very pathetic about the helplessness of the Infant Savior and the homelessness of the little Holy Family.

There is no Christmas without Christ. If we would grasp its real spirit we must become as little children, kneeling before the crib. Beautiful words of description are out of place here. For there is no pretty word that means "stable;" there is no warm, cheery expression that means "chill night air;" there is no handsome way to say "we have no room." In the simple language of children, Tuesday is the birthday of Jesus.

Bethlehem, Christ's birthday, midnight and the stars! Midnight, and the unweary angels deck the sky asinging Glorias to their new-born King. Midnight, and what was, an hour before, a lowly cave, has now been changed into a sanctuary of eternal love. A village maid, virgin all the while, has even now brought forth her first-born Son, Priest of kingdom come, covered His tender body with swaddling bands, and laid Him in a manger on the tufted straw. Lord God of heaven and earth, Redeemer to be of all mankind, He; and she, Mystical Rose in the garden of

salvation. And yet, a village maid and her little newborn Son!

Those tiny lips will someday reveal things hidden from the foundation of the world; those little hands and feet will someday be spiked to a cross. That Child who was born a scant few moments ago, will live His span of life and die as a criminal on Calvary before two score years have passed. But He will change the complexion of the world for all time to come. He will be loved more completely and hated more violently than anyone else in all history. He is Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God .

There beside the manger, more fair than the miraculous star beckoning the wise men, more fair than seraphic choirs arrayed against the sable sky, more fair than the sun rolling out into space in the springtime of creation—the village maid, His little mother. There too, a strong, silent, just man! A man whose heart has been crushed by relatives and friends; driven by rejection to offer his foster-Son a birthplace in a stable.

That was the first Christmas; nineteen centuries ago, when the whole world was at peace, and Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Juda of the Virgin Mary.

Now we are approaching

Christmas 1945. When the day is over, Tuesday next, and the muted songs of carolers linger in the mind, and tired children are tottering to bed, and love's long lost voices call the lonesome memory back to our own childhood Christmases; Tuesday night we shall sigh and ask accounting of the day's worth. Only will our reckoning prove that this Christmas has been worthwhile, if we have carried off the Infant Jesus from His crib, to cradle Him in our hearts.

Let there be no mistake. For anyone who is endowed with Catholic faith, lodging Christ in the heart means, first of all, receiving Him in Holy Communion. Our Lord arranged to be born in a distressful stable so that you and I, in pity, would take Him out of it. If we have held aloof from Him because of pride, reflect: There was no pride about the manger. He is a winsome little Beggar who first seeks entrance into our hearts, and then boldly gives us away to everybody we meet. It seems a strange procedure, but it is an unfailing formula of joy. This is why Christmastide is a special time for distributing gifts. If our giving presents is a mere social formality and is scaled to our anticipated returns, then either

we have failed to harbor Christ or we have curbed His spirit by our own dull calculations.

The real spirit of Christmas is the spirit of Christ. It is a spirit of charity and of mercy; of generosity and forgiveness. When that ingenious Infant Master has His way, the doors of our hearts do not inclose Him in secluded safety; our hearts are thrown wide open and His baby laugh echoes everywhere. The postman smiles at your door; the newsboy is beaming and whistling; the ruddy policeman chuckles and waves a cheering hand; the little nun's shoes do a tap as she scampers to the community room; everyone in the family is laughing and gay. When the real spirit of Christmas is in the air we have the indefinable feeling that, for a while at least, our generous little Lord, in us, has had His fling.

So see Him in the market place. See Him in your home. See His capering in children. Hear Him in the Christmas carols. See His dancing eyes behind the festooned tree. See Him in every stranger's face. And then, much to your surprise, though He seems to be everywhere else, you will find Him in your heart. That is Christmas.

My dear friends, we shall all be busy tomorrow in our final preparations. I, with my fellow priests, throughout the world, shall be occupied hearing confessions all day long and through the evening: I hope that any Catholic who is not yet ready to receive our Lord in Holy Communion, will be ready before tomorrow is over. Do not attempt a Christmas without Christ.

As a parting "Merry Christmas" I am going to quote some lines composed by Father Charles O'Donnell, late President of Notre Dame University:

Sweeter than honey and the  
honeycomb,  
And fairer than the stars are  
after rain,  
The young girl, in her anguish,  
far from home,  
Knocks at their midnight doors,  
and knocks in vain.  
I think she would put out her  
eyes with weeping—  
Men die, they are not born upon  
the street—  
Well, here a shed, with cattle  
dully sleeping,  
Angels of God have pity on her,  
sweet.  
He was so helpless, that good

man beside her,  
Heaven and earth were powerless  
in her power.  
And who would ask for Him a  
cradle golden,  
That in her arms and on her  
breast was folden?  
The legioned angels come at  
length and sing,  
Come wondering shepherds with  
their tardy sheep,  
And later, star-led, king shall  
ride with king  
To lay their grandeur where He  
lies asleep.  
She would be patient in that hour  
of splendor,  
As she was silent in her lonely  
grief—  
The Mother is so wise, the maid  
so tender,  
And her good man believed be-  
yond belief,  
They two shall keep Him safe,  
the world's Desire,  
And one, upon the breast that is  
the Lord's  
Shall die—not she; the dread  
years shall conspire  
Against her, and the edge of  
seven swords.  
Ah, by the tears that blur my  
human eyes,  
I shall not quit her feet in Para-  
dise.\*

\*Quoted with permission of Ave Maria in which the poem originally appeared.

# HEROES IN THE MAKING

Talk Given On December 30, 1945

Not long ago I was conducting a mission at St. Columbanus' parish in Chicago. One day about noon I had a visitor who was seeking my advice. He was a fine young man, six and a half years of age. He had his first-grade reader under his arm. "I want to be a priest when I grow up," said he; "could you let me take the first book I'll have to study?" We had a long chat about the making of a priest and he went on his happy way with as much knowledge on the subject as his busy little mind could carry.

There are thousands of boys and girls still in tender years who are considering some day becoming priests or brothers or nuns. What are they like, you ask. Are they prodigies or oddities? No. They are normal boys and girls, of good character and reasonably good talent. Some, of course, will be far above the average; but they all have this in common, that they desire to serve God in a special way. The mystery of God's grace working in His creatures must remain obscure but the stages from that first desire to its realization are

neither mysterious nor vague. I would like to tell you about this process. Regardless of your religious persuasion you will find it interesting. Let's start with a boy who lives down the street from you. He is like any of the other school boys in the neighborhood. You see him passing your house day by day. You see him playing ball or raking the leaves in his yard; cutting the grass, or shovelling the snow from the walk. You see him skating or flying a kite. He is going to be a priest! Watch him, and see how it happens.

When or how he gets the idea of becoming a priest is the mystery of God's grace. It comes in about as many different ways as there are individuals. But watch the boy because he has that idea now. He is thrilled by it, and he is worried. So he talks it over with the priest of the parish. Father tells him to consider the desire seriously but not fretfully. He learns of the many specialized works which priests do: the care of souls in a parish like his own; teaching in high schools and colleges; missionary work in our own country

or in foreign lands.

He is in eighth grade now and as the days pass he is thinking it over seriously, and praying for God to help him decide. He has his mind made up about wanting to be a priest but he must choose the special priestly work for which he thinks he is best suited and in which he believes he will be happy. He decides in favor of the work as parish priest. Do you think him too young to make a decision? Well, he still has at least twelve years in which to change his mind. In his high school work he will specialize in Latin and Greek; but his course will be of general academics.

His college course will emphasize philosophy; but it will include a generous cultural training in general history, church history, chemistry and biology, mathematics, modern languages, etc.

The little boy we started with is now a young man. You have not seen him very often except for brief vacation visits back to his home. Perhaps you meet him on one of these occasions and you ask "Will you soon be a priest?" "Only four more years," he replies. And you wonder: What in the world are they teaching him! But he's gone away again and only now does he begin his

specialized education: four years on Catholic doctrinal teachings; the moral law, its principles and applications; church law and discipline; public speaking and preaching; ceremonial conduct and sacred chant; a minute and reverential study of the Bible. During all these years he lives according to strict rule. Besides study and lectures, his day includes time for prayer and meditation, Mass and spiritual reading. He has daily recreation too. When the hourly schedule is planned, much can be fitted into a day. Presuming that during those years he has not changed his mind about wanting to be a priest or about the type of work he wishes to do, he is ordained at about the age of twenty-five and begins his life work as a parish priest.

Perhaps you wonder at all the training, its necessity and its value. He needs every bit of it because he must render religious service to a cross-section of humanity. He must be competent to teach, to advise spiritually, to serve anyone and everyone. The Catholic Church wants him to be another Christ in his community. Remember that we started with the little boy who lived down the street. The years of moral and mental training are none too

many to prepare him for a life task of such importance. He was a good, plain boy with ordinary talent. The Church relies upon God's grace to make him and keep him a good, capable priest. But she uses reasonable care that the seeds of grace planted by the Divine Sower will grow in fertile, cultivated ground. If the lad at the outset or along the way decided in favor of the life in the priesthood as a high school or college teacher, or in favor of the life of a missionary priest either here in America or in a foreign land, his course of training would follow much the same pattern as I have already stated. But now he will be given additional training to equip him for the special tasks in which he will be engaged. Or perhaps he prefers a priestly life in a monastery or religious community. Having joined a religious order his training will then include a study of the rule of the order, and a course of indoctrination and discipline which will fit him to pursue the ideals and aspirations of his spiritual family.

So you see what happens when little boys get big ideas. If your boy gets an idea such as this, be happy about it, for God is showing special favor to your home.

Don't push the lad and don't discourage him. Give him the same help and benevolence that loving parents lend to the hopes and ambitions of their children in choosing any path of life.

Within the Catholic Church there are also brotherhoods of men devoted to special works of religion. These men are not priests; they are men who live a community life and bind themselves to a special rule which enables them to devote their common efforts to various exemplary works. In almost any religious work which does not require the power received in ordination, you will find brothers quietly walking a path of service to God and fellowmen.

For a girl to become a nun, the Catholic Church again sets down reasonable requirements. She must be a normal girl of good character and at least average talent. The desire to serve God in a special way is once more the secret of God's grace. But when we speak of God's grace we are not describing an apparition or a vision or a miracle. There would be very few women serving God and humanity in religious sisterhoods if they had waited for some prodigious manifestation to invite them.

The girl who, by God's grace

and the use of her own mind and will, has decided upon the life of a nun, can choose from as many special types of work as the charity of Christ has produced. I shall always cherish in my memory the good sisters who took care of the domestic department at the seminary. You will find sisters doing the work of our Divine Master in schools at all educational levels, homes for infants and for the aged, hospitals and asylums and orphanages, spiritual retreat houses, the cloistered walls echoing intercession for humanity; from these she makes her choice. And having chosen the religious community whose pattern of life and work appeals to her, she takes up residence at the motherhouse to try out the life. She continues her education from the point where she left off. As a rule she has already completed high school and will now go on with college studies.

Meanwhile she is living the life to decide if she likes it. For the next six to nine years she makes no permanent decision. If she is fitted for the life she will at long last make her final decision, and she will be happy in it. If during those trial years she decides against pursuing this manner of life she will return

home under no shadow or cloud. She will be happy in the knowledge that she gave a fair trial to convent life.

The boy or girl who has a vocation to God's special service, will be happier in that pursuit than in any other. The life has its sacrifices but it has its consolations too. Not the least of its rewards is the joy of serving humanity in the Master's Name.

I would like to climax these thoughts on vocation with some lines which I treasure very much. They were written by my own father as a gift to me on the occasion of my ordination as a sub-deacon.

No earthly goods may I sell, O  
Lord,

For nothing of earth is mine,  
I offer my life, 'tis all I have,  
This heart which Thou gavest is  
Thine.

Naught of the earth doth my  
soul desire,

Nor honor, nor power, nor fame;  
I seek but to comfort "the least  
of these"

And serve in the Master's Name.  
Grant but the strength to en-  
dure the day,

The burden, the toil, the heat,  
And grace at its close to bring  
their fruits

To lay at Thy Sacred Feet.

(C. A. McCarthy).

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New York	Massena	WNSA	1340 kc
	New York	WJZ	770 kc
	Plattsburg	WMFF	1340 kc
	Poughkeepsie	WKIP	1450 kc
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	Cleveland	WJW	850 kc
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	Tulsa	KOME	1340 kc
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(Revised as of January, 1946)



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