

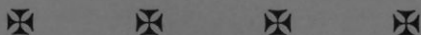
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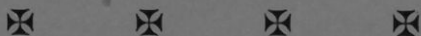
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YOU ARE



THE CHURCH



Gerald M. Dolan, O.F.M.



ST. ANTHONY'S GUILD

Paterson, N. J.



YOU ARE
THE CHURCH

**YOU ARE
THE CHURCH**

George M. Dwyer, O.F.M.

St. Anthony's Field

Paterson, N.J.

1963

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YOU ARE THE CHURCH

GERALD M. DOLAN, O.F.M.

St. Anthony's Guild
Paterson, N. J.



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"... The faithful, more precisely the laity, are in the front line of the Church's life; through them the Church is the vital principle of human society."

— POPE PIUS XII

"The Church of today, of the present, is the Kingdom of Christ, and the Kingdom of heaven."

— ST. AUGUSTINE

"The Church

was Christ's theme throughout His public life. He outlined its characteristics in parables. It was coming, yet it had already begun to exist. Though of heaven, it would be of earth. It would enclose within it, as a net encloses fish, all manner of men, good and bad, who would dwell together, to be separated only at the end of time. It would be a pearl of great price, for which the one beholding it would sacrifice all he possessed. Entrance to it would require nothing less than a new birth. Beginning as a tiny seed, it would grow into a great sheltering tree. It would be visible to all, yet its action would be as silent as that of yeast leavening dough."

**YOU ARE
THE CHURCH**

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WHEREVER ONE
may go in the world, the Catholic Church is
there. Into whatever field of human activity
one may enter, the influence of the Church
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of antiquity, witness the past and
all tendencies of architectural genius, bear
witness to its continuity and perennial youth.
It is ancient and purgative in its solemn

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saints, but of all men, and
those who would dwell together, to be assem-
bled only at the end of time. It would be
a part of your life, for which the one
belonging it would receive nothing less
than a new birth. Beginning as a tiny seed,
it would grow into a great gathering tree.
It would be visible to all, for its branches would
be of every kind of man, and every tongue.

ISA 60:1
HONORUM INT

YOU ARE THE CHURCH

WHEREVER ONE may go in the world, the Catholic Church is there. Into whatever field of human activity one may enter, the influence of the Church is felt. Throughout the world, cathedrals and churches, some the artistic monuments of antiquity, others revealing the most modern tendencies of architectural genius, bear witness to its continuity and perennial youth. It is ancient and picturesque in its solemn

rites, yet at home with the most recent administrative techniques. It is in the world, visible for all to see, yet shrouded in other-world mystery. It is loved; it is feared; it is hated; it is persecuted. But with imper-turbable purpose, despite every obstacle, it goes about its business in the calm assurance that, as it has outlived its enemies in the past, so it will continue to do till time is no more.

Christ's Work

To understand its mission, one must ask what was the mission of Christ. St. John writes in the Prologue of his Gospel: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him He gave the power of becoming sons of God." The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man to restore what man had lost. God had created Adam to be the father of the human race, endowed him with a mind and a will, made him capable of rendering homage and thanks to his Creator on behalf of all creation. Adam's body was made in the likeness of material things; but his soul, having received sanctifying

grace, a spark of the divine life, was made in the image and likeness of God Himself. Through this gift he would be, not only a creature destined for this world, but a son of God with the birthright to an eternity in heaven.

But the gift of grace, for Adam and his progeny, was conditional upon obedience. When Adam disobeyed, as St. Paul tells us, "through one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, and thus death has passed unto all men because all have sinned." Yet the Creator, in His mercy, would not leave man without a second chance. He promised a Redeemer: One who, atoning for the sins of men, would reinstate them as children of God and heirs of heaven.

The Coming of the Kingdom

Christ died for all men; being God, He could have transmitted the blessings of His redemption directly to all. But He chose that His creatures should collaborate with Him. He would establish a Church wherein men, united with Him, would distribute to others the benefits of His sacrificial death.

This Church was Christ's theme throughout His public life. He described the role it would play among men under the name of "the Kingdom of heaven." He outlined its characteristics in parables. It was coming, yet it had already begun to exist. Though of heaven, it would be of earth. It would enclose within it, as a net encloses fish, all manner of men, good and bad, who would dwell together, to be separated only at the end of time. It would be a pearl of great price, for which the one beholding it would sacrifice all he possessed. Entrance to it would require nothing less than a new birth. Beginning as a tiny seed, it would grow into a great sheltering tree. It would be visible to all, yet its action would be as silent as that of yeast leavening dough.

He proclaimed the coming of this Kingdom to everyone, but to a chosen few He explained its mysteries. Twelve men would be His vicegerents, the rulers and directors of the Kingdom. To them would be given power from heaven to teach all men, to legislate the laws of the Kingdom, and, through the sacraments, to apply the merits of Christ's redemptive death to souls. One of these twelve, Peter, would be their leader

and chief. To him were promised "the keys of the Kingdom" — the power to admit entrance or refuse it. Peter's power would be ratified in heaven. He would be the special object of the prayer of Christ that his faith, once strengthened, might confirm the faith of the others. Finally, Peter was given the office of shepherd of all Christ's flock — the power and authority to teach, rule, and sanctify all men. In him would the unity of the Kingdom center; upon him, as upon a cornerstone, would the Kingdom find its firm support.

The role of the Church had been described, its ruling authority instituted; now its charter would be declared. Just before His Ascension, Christ said to His Apostles: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world." A greater challenge has never been given: to bring to all men the Word of God; to bring to all men that which Christ had died to secure, a

sharing, through grace, in the divine life here and hereafter; to gather all men under the regimen necessary for carrying out Christ's mission in the world.

The Church Is Born

The Church itself, born from the pierced side of the Saviour on the cross, would receive the breath of life on Pentecost Sunday. During the Last Supper, our Lord had promised to send the Apostles "another Advocate" who would make clear and firm in their minds whatever Christ had told them. In the great wind and the tongues of flame of Pentecost, this Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of light and of truth, came down upon them. He was to be their life, confirming their efforts, leading the Church strongly yet gently to the destiny given it by its Founder.

St. Paul describes the Church to the Ephesians under the aspect of a living, organic body: "And He Himself gave some men as Apostles, and some as prophets, . . . for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and the

deep knowledge of the Son of God, to perfect manhood, ... for from Him the whole body (being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system according to the functioning in due measure of each single part) derives its increase to the building up of itself in love."

Christ's Mystical Body

Such is the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Though the term is metaphorical, it does express in a concrete way the relation the individual baptized Christian bears to Christ. Every living body is an ordered complex of separate parts. Although each carries out its own definite function, its action is in itself incomplete; for each part is designed to contribute to the welfare of the whole. The individual parts indeed possess life, but only in and through the life of the organism. If a cell or organ is separated from the whole, it will wither and die.

So too with the Mystical Body. Christ, visibly represented in the world by His Vicar

the Pope, is the Head of this Body. The individual members are Christians, united with Him in their firm acceptance of His word. They are subject to His authority and the authority of their bishops, and through Baptism receive supernatural life, sanctifying grace, communicated through the Holy Spirit, who is the soul, the vital principle, of the whole. They are to work together, in harmony and proper subordination, to fulfill that for which Christ instituted the Church, the salvation of all mankind. And, in working for the good of the Body, they perfect themselves, growing ever more in the image of Christ, the Head.

This was the image of the Church in the mind of St. Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians: "Now you are the Body of Christ, member for member." He was addressing himself to the whole Church, clergy and laity alike. Nor was his declaration limited to the Apostolic age. It applies to each successive period, and speaks with special emphasis to our own. We too must be conscious of and committed to our mission in the world, which is to extend and strengthen the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Church Today

Now, the civilization of the twentieth century has some admirable qualities. But it is secular. Its interest is in procuring as many benefits, material, social, intellectual and moral, as possible, but it is limited to the here and the now. Moreover the standard according to which the "good life" is judged has become ever more dependent on the machinery of material production. The drive to accumulate material goods has never been more furious. This mass mania for possession tends to force men into economic and social bondage. As the demand for goods increases, so does the power of those who hold the reins of production. There is constant pressure to convince men that non-essentials are essential. And with this pressure, the determination of what is good for the individual passes more and more from himself to a power outside himself, whether industry or a benevolent state. To the individual person striving for security and status, this is the current danger.

Here is the world which the Church, Christ's Mystical Body, must change, win over, and lead once more to the feet of God.

In this work of renewal and redemption, the layman must find his proper place and function. Not that the laity are liberated from the teaching authority of the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops, to whom in a very special manner Christ entrusted the guardianship of His revelation. But as free and adult Christians in belief and profession, they are to be witnesses, each in his own capacity and environment, to the word of God. For Christ wills that the salvation of all men shall depend on the work of His members, freely co-operating with Him and organically united to the authority He has established on earth.

Christ needs free and adult Christians. A child is born. Throughout the years of childhood he is kept within narrow bounds and taught the things he will need for his future years. Only little by little is he given independence from parental authority. Finally the day comes when he launches out into the world to make his own way. But is he thereby a free adult? He may be constrained by no external pressure to do this or that. But only when he becomes conscious that there are others in the world to whom he can minister, and strives to be of service

to them, will he be a free adult. For to be free is to be liberated from self, and to be mature is to see others as one sees oneself. And this freedom will only be enhanced when he becomes conscious that his whole being depends on God, that God is the source, the meaning, the end of his life, and he gives himself wholly up to God's will. Then shall he taste true liberty.

In the spiritual life also there is childhood and maturity. Through Baptism, a man is reborn and given individuality in the Church. He receives grace and holiness; the image of Christ is stamped on his soul. The Holy Spirit comes to him to strengthen and guide him. He is entrusted with the word of God, the Creed and the Commandments. He is to become instructed by hearing the word of God. He is to strive to grow in perfection by practicing the word of God. And he is made capable of receiving the other sacraments, through whose graces he will advance toward the "perfect manhood" described by St. Paul.

Confirmation is the specific sacrament of Christian maturity. The Christian receiving it ceases to be a child who must be warned and cajoled into fulfilling his obligations.

Through the anointing of the bishop, the Holy Spirit is given to him that, as by another Pentecost, he may assume his proper place and function in the Church. He must become conscious of its needs, and of his own responsibility to help in their fulfillment. He is now not merely the statistical stuff out of which the Church is made; rather, conforming himself to unity of faith and discipline, he in a true sense **MAKES** the Church.

"You Are the Church"

Pope Pius XII had this sense of Christian commitment in mind when, in 1946, he spoke to the newly created Cardinals the following significant words: "The Church cannot shut herself up, inactive, in the privacy of her churches, and thus neglect the mission entrusted to her by divine Providence, . . . The Church is the society of those who, under the supernatural influence of grace, in the perfection of their personal dignity as sons of God, and in the harmonious development of every human bent and energy, build up the mighty framework of the community of men. From this aspect the faithful, more

precisely the laity, are in the front line of the Church's life; through them the Church is the vital principle of human society. Consequently, they particularly must have an ever clearer consciousness, not only of belonging to the Church, but of BEING THE CHURCH, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the common head, the Pope, and of the bishops in communion with him."

Hear Christ, speaking through His Vicar, tell Christians, and particularly the laity: YOU ARE THE CHURCH.

How can you, adult Christian living in modern society, fulfill this commitment? How can you present a true image of the Church to those about you? The concrete ways are limitless, but they fall into three groups.

"If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you." Your first duty is PRAYER. Pray for the Pope and the bishops that they may be strong and forthright in defending the deposit of faith which Christ has given into their keeping. Pray for your pastors and all priests, that they may be selfless in their care of souls. Pray for

missionaries, that, overcoming discouragement and anxiety, they may always press onward to bring the word of God to those who do not know Him. Pray for those who are not members of the Church, and even for those who actively persecute her throughout the world, that God's grace may remove every cloud of doubt and pride from their minds and lead them to their true home. Pray for the whole Church and for the Church in our own country, that throughout all her ranks she may ever perfect herself to be worthy of her Head.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its strength, what shall it be salted with?" You must grow in PERSONAL HOLINESS. To be committed to the Christian life is no small matter; it is to take to heart Christ's injunction: "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." It is to grow in grace by receiving the sacraments often and well. It is to read the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, and those books which provide solid food for thought and reflection, the basis of spiritual growth. It is to carry out the duties of your state in life, whether married or single, according to God's law. It is to make dynamic

in your life the virtues of faith, hope and charity. It is to live in this world, busy and active, but to aim for heaven.

Lastly, APOSTOLIC WORKS help you to carry forward in your sphere the riches of the Church which have been entrusted to you. It is apostolic for parents to instruct their children in the truths of faith, and teach them to pray. It is apostolic for them to make their home a home of virtue and love of God. It is apostolic to teach others the catechism. It is apostolic to insist on honesty and fairness in the business world. It is apostolic to be concerned that the affairs of government, in which by your vote you have a voice, be regulated according to the demands of justice and right. It is apostolic to participate in the liturgy by serving as lay reader for the Dialogue Mass. And it is apostolic to enroll in those specifically approved associations which perform, under the direction of the bishops, a definite function in the Church, such as the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the Legion of Mary and the Christian Family Movement.

These are among the many ways in which you, the layman, can share in the apostolate,

witnessing by your works to the truth of the Gospel. And having begun, you will find it not only possible but deeply satisfying to make more and more room, even in your modern, compartmented life, for the needs of the living Body of which you are a part. For you will be more and more conscious of the loving rule of Him who is the Head, Christ.

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