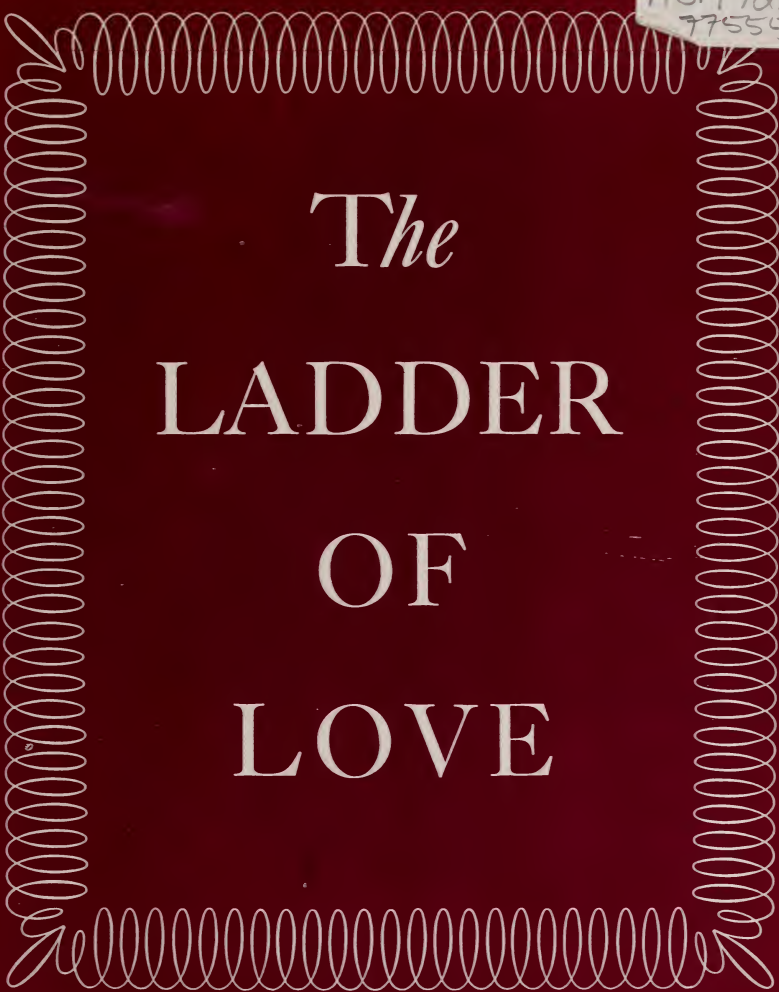


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*The*  
LADDER  
OF  
LOVE

Rev. John A. O'Brien



# The Ladder of Love

Four addresses delivered on The Catholic Hour from June 5, 1955, through June 26, 1955, by the Rev. John A. O'Brien. The program is produced by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company.

BY  
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# The Great Commandment

Address Delivered on June 5, 1955

One of the most significant scenes in the life of Christ was enacted in Jerusalem when one of the Pharisees, a doctor of the law, asked Jesus: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Here was a question which went to the very heart of the Master's teachings: Its answer would render possible the establishment of a hierarchy of values without which no ethical system or philosophy of life is possible.

Recognizing its relevance, Christ immediately replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Then He added: "On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets."

This twofold commandment to love God and our neighbor epitomizes Christ's essential message to mankind. It constitutes the foundation and the apex of the Christian faith; it runs like threads of gold through the warp and woof of the New Testament; in its observance is the fulfillment of all the commandments. If one loves God, he will keep His

commandments and if he loves his fellow man, he will respect his rights.

No other teaching of the divine Master stands in such urgent need of being written upon the skies of America and of the world today. Following as an aftermath of the war with its emphasis upon hatred and destruction, a tidal wave of rancor and bitterness has swept across the nations of the world, arraying class against class and kindling the embers of suspicion into the flames of hatred and strife. The tragedy of modern civilization is that we have prostituted the findings of science to implement our hatred instead of our love.

We are speaking of love not as a mere instinct, an expression of the sensual appetite, an emotional reaction to sensory stimuli or an ephemeral sentiment, but as a theological virtue, of which the other two are faith and hope. In this sense love is a divinely infused habit inclining the will to cherish God for His own sake above all things, and man for the sake of God. It is the virtue which joins us to God in the bonds of the highest friendship so that our will is intimately united with His. "God is love," says St. John, "and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in

Him."<sup>1</sup> This union, begun in this life, finds its completion through the beatific vision in Heaven. Indeed, this is the chief joy of Heaven and its very essence.

We are indebted not to any movement of the sensible appetite but to God for this divine gift. "The charity of Christ," St. Paul tells us, "is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."<sup>2</sup> It is infused along with sanctifying grace to which it is closely related. Its seat is not in the emotions but in the rational will, thus enabling us to direct it to a person regardless of the reactions of the senses—whether he appeals to us as attractive or not.

Great as are faith and hope, love towers above them. "The greatest of these," says St. Paul, "is charity."<sup>3</sup> "The other two virtues, faith and hope," Cardinal Wiseman beautifully observes, "dwell in the porch of God's house; they are as the lamp and the perfume of the outer sanctuary, placed here to enlighten and refresh us, who worship without the veil."

God is our first beginning and our last end, the alpha and omega of our being. He is the

highest Good and we must love Him with our whole heart and soul and desire to have Him honored, glorified and loved by all His creatures. In addition, we must manifest our love by keeping His commandments.

"If you love me," says Jesus, "keep my commandments."<sup>4</sup> Echoing this admonition, St. Paul says, "Love is the fulfillment of the law." With what tenderness and love does the Beloved Disciple drive this truth home to us when he says, "Little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth."<sup>5</sup>

### Our First Duty

We should love God above all other persons and things because He alone is infinitely worthy of our love, and we should be willing to lose everything, even life itself, rather than offend Him. God dwells in the soul of those who love Him, and in possessing Him they possess everything of value — gladness, peace and joy. Where love is, there is God; where God is, there is Heaven; where God is not, there is Hell.

The first duty of the creature then is to give God the homage, worship and reverence which are due Him as the Creator. To withhold that from God is to defraud Him. How disturbing it is to realize that in this country on any Sunday in the year there are more than a hundred million men, women and children who attend no

1 1 John 4:16

2 Romans 5:5

3 1 Corinthians 13:13

4 John 14:15

5 1 John 3:18



religious service, who raise no hands in prayer and homage to the God who made them. This is the subversion of the whole moral order, the crime of treason against the Sovereign of the universe and the cancer gnawing deeply into the spiritual life of our nation.

But, you may ask, why are we obliged to give homage to Almighty God? Because He is our Creator, to whom we owe our very existence as well as all the faculties of our minds and bodies. The new-born babe is a picture of utter helplessness, unable to provide for a single one of its many needs. Unless the parents feed and shelter it, it speedily dies.

Even greater is our dependence upon God, without whose sustaining power we would cease to be and without whose active cooperation we are unable to do so much as move a finger. The dependence of the babe upon his parents is, moreover, a temporary one which will be outgrown; whereas our dependence upon the Creator for both our continuance in existence and for all our thoughts and actions is permanent and absolute. Written upon every atom of our being is the Creator's title-deed, "Thou art mine, body, mind and soul, and all thou canst do."

#### **A Dictate of Reason**

It is a dictate of reason and a mandate of the Most High that the creature should ack-

nowledge that indebtedness. That is precisely what we do when we worship God, when we offer Him sacrifice and when we give Him our homage and our love. The essence of religion consists in the free and practical acknowledgement of God's supreme and sovereign dominion over us and of our complete and abiding dependence upon Him.

What would you think of the child who ignores the father who begot him, who utters no word of gratitude and love to the mother who bore him and ministered to his every need? Suppose he were to say to them? "Though I am indebted to you for my every existence and for all the tender and loving care you bestowed upon me, I shall address to you no word of honor, gratitude or love. I shall not recognize you as my parents and I shall ignore you as if you didn't even exist."

Wouldn't you say that such a child was a monster of ingratitude, a moral degenerate, worthy only of scorn and reprobation? Must not the same sentence of condemnation be passed upon the creature who acts in substantially the same manner in regard to his Heavenly Father, Almighty God? Isn't it apparent that such a person is guilty of a profoundly immoral act — an act of ingratitude, disloyalty and of treason to the God who made him?

Surely if the worldling who turns his back upon God and ignores His existence were to reflect upon these facts he would see that he is not less guilty than the man who refuses to pay his debts to his grocer, butcher or baker. In these latter instances, he is cheating a fellow creature, in the former he is defrauding God Himself. He is duplicating the action of Lucifer whose rebellious cry, "I will not serve Thee!" has blackened the centuries with the tragedy of treason. He is walking in the footsteps of Judas Iscariot who betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

Considering the vast number of people who rarely, if ever, attend any church, there is no truth that needs to be sounded so loudly or so persistently in the ears of the American people as that of the duty of rendering homage and worship to the God who made them. It is man's first and supreme duty. Anyone who violates it should feel upon his brow the mark of Cain, in his heart the treason of Benedict Arnold, and in his conscience the guilt of Judas.

#### **An Inspiring Example**

For nineteen centuries the love of God and the desire to see Him loved and glorified by all creatures have prompted young men and women to leave father and mother, sister and

brother, land and kinsfolk to bring the good tidings of man's redemption and of Christ's consuming love to all people, both at home and abroad. But it is not necessary to be a religious or a missionary to spread the knowledge and the love of God. This is a task in which the lay person can participate with unusual effectiveness because of his many contacts.

Charlie Fischer, a laborer at the Illinois Central shop at Champaign, Illinois, had only a grade school education but he was able to kindle the love of God in the hearts of many of his fellow-workers. Each year for twenty years he won one churchless man for Christ and each of these subsequently brought their families into active religious life and worship, so that no fewer than a hundred persons had their drab empty lives filled with the radiance, beauty, and love of God because of his neighborly zeal.

"Charlie," I once asked, "how in the world did you manage to kindle the love of God in so many souls?"

"Father," he replied, "I didn't find it especially hard. On Monday morning I would say to a fellow-worker,

"'Hank, did you go to church yesterday?'"

"When he would acknowledge that he hadn't, I would say,

“But, Hank, aren't you more than an animal that eats, sleeps, propagates and dies?”

“Yes,” he would reply.

“Then I would ask him why he thought he was more than an animal. Usually he would be at a loss to say why.

“Then I'd say, ‘You're more than an animal, Hank, because you have an immortal soul made in the image and likeness of God. That's the part of our nature that we must nourish by contact with God, by prayer, by worship, by acts of faith, hope and love. God wants us to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this life that we may be happy with Him for all eternity.’

“How,” Hank would ask, ‘do I go about doing that?’

“You can come to church with me,” I would reply, ‘and I'll see that you get a good course of instruction about God and His plan for your salvation.

“That, Father, was the simple way I was able to bring God and His love into the hearts of a hundred churchless people. They said it meant more to them than if I had given them a million dollars.”

### Filling a Void

If every person who believes in God, loves Him and worships Him were to take such an unselfish interest in his churchless neighbor, the hundred million churchless

people in our land would soon find their lives transformed by the knowledge and love of God. They would not fail to worship and reverence Him on the Lord's day and to pray to Him every day of their lives. That is the most precious contribution we can make to the enrichment of the lives of our non-church-going friends and neighbors. It must be done humbly, prayerfully and unselfishly, with no thought but of his deepest welfare and happiness.

There is an emptiness in the life of the individual who is untouched by God. Like a ship without a rudder, he is traveling in circles, with no goal, no destiny to achieve. Man is more than an animal, and deep in his soul is the hunger and craving which only God can fill.

There is a God-ache which all the material pleasures of life can't appease. St. Augustine who sought to ease that ache by indulgence in the sensual pleasures of Carthage and Rome cried out at last: “Our hearts have been made for Thee, O God, and they shall never rest until they rest in Thee.” In that cry is reflected the experience of man since time began, and it will still be true at the crack of doom.

For many years the noted Fulton Oursler wandered in the fog of unbelief. Restless and ill at ease, he had started to write

a book, **A Sceptic in the Holy Land**. But the more carefully he studied the life of Christ and meditated on those scenes in the Holy Land, the more clearly did he see the beauty of that divine personality and the truth of His teachings. Embracing the Catholic faith, he wrote a beautiful and reverent life of Christ. Shortly before his death he said, "To all those who are attracted and yet frightened and reluctant, I say there is no way to peace on earth except in the footsteps of the Master." In finding Christ and His love, he found the peace of soul for which he had long been searching.

Jacques Maritain is one of the most eminent philosophers of our day, but he was led to Christ by a man who had no philosophic training — Leon Bloy. Bloy spoke to him simply of the mercy and love of God and had him read the lives of the saints and the mystics and begin to pray. Maritain, a professor at the Sorbonne, began with the hypothetical prayer, "My God, if you exist, and if you are the Truth, make me know it." Later he knelt down and recited the Lord's Prayer for the first time in his life. No man on his bended knees ever prays to God in vain. God heard his cry and gave him the grace of faith.

On the day when Jacques Maritain and his wife Raissa were baptized, Bloy wrote in

his diary: "It is something to think that when I die I shall leave, kneeling beside me and weeping from love, people who knew nothing of God or of His love before they met me." Into the darkness of two souls Leon Bloy brought the radiance and the love of God. That is the role that we are all called upon to play — the role of a Christopher, carrying Christ to others.

Religion floods our darkness with a divine light. It discloses our ultimate destiny and provides us with the means of attaining it. It makes clear to us that only in the possession of God, who is infinite Beauty, Truth and Love, will the soul find the answer to its ceaseless questing.

Thus does religion enable us to form a true hierarchy of values by appraising all things in accordance with the degree in which they aid us in the achievement of eternal life. It enables us to put first things first. It guides us in offering our supreme loyalty to God and in putting ourselves in the right relationship to God. "If you are not right toward God," wrote Lord Chatham to his nephew, "you can never be so toward man; and this is forever true, whether wits and rakes allow it or not."

#### God Brings Peace

Without religion we cannot be right toward God, toward man or toward ourselves. With religion and with the faithful

fulfillment of all its commands we look upon life and the universe with a serene eye and a peaceful heart. Clasp His almighty hand, we know that no evil can befall us. We can see His face in earth and sky, His laughter in the running brook, and His voice in every song bird's call. To the believer, as Hood points out,

Each cloud-capped mountain  
is a holy altar,

An organ breathes in every  
grove;

And the full heart's a Psalter,  
Rich in deep hymns of gratitude  
and love.

The great commandment to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul requires us then to honor, reverence and worship Him and to strive to see Him loved and glorified by all His creatures. To bring God, His truth and love to all who

know Him not is then an expression of unselfish love: it is good Christianity and good patriotism. For the citizen who is rooted in the knowledge and love of God will be devoted to his country, his community and his neighbor. He will be vaccinated against the poison of atheistic communism with its threat to everything we hold dear in Christian civilization.

Today the world asks the question, put to the Lord by the doctor of the law centuries ago: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" We fain would write His answer in every mind and heart and emblazon it upon the skies of all the world, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment."



# Love's Magic and Mystery

Address Delivered on June 12, 1955

Christianity is a religion of love and its first and greatest commandment is: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." To love God is to wish Him all honor and glory and every good and endeavor to obtain it for Him. Thus it is the love of God that inspires all missionary work and all efforts to win souls for Him. "Let us love God," says St. John, "for God hath first loved us."

The greatest incentive toward living a good life is the love of God. It makes the keeping of the commandments a pleasure and a joy. Indeed, the first three commandments are embodied in this commandment and the remaining seven are embodied in the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. The love of God is more than a precept; it is the principle and goal of moral perfection and the most important factor in the two main phases of our spiritual life: justification and the acquisition of merit.

When motivated by love, all our actions, even those which are indifferent in themselves, are made meritorious. Thus the widow who out of love gives her mite receives a greater reward than the proud Pharisee who gave his offering of gold largely out of vanity.

To keep the love of God burning in our hearts we should not only keep His commandments but also utter frequent ejaculations and acts of love. Say often: "My God and my all!" "My Jesus, I love Thee with my whole heart and soul!" "O Lord, I offer Thee all my thoughts, words and deeds." "Grant, dear Jesus, that I may love Thee more and more!" "Jesus, my God, I love Thee above all things." Never allow a day to go by without uttering many such brief expressions of love for the God who made you. They will keep the flame of love ever burning in your heart.

St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes three principal stages of growth in the love of God. The first is freedom from mortal sin by strenuous resistance to temptation. The second is the avoidance of deliberate venial sins by the diligent practice of virtue. The third stage is union with God through the frequent recurrence of acts of love. To these, ascetic writers like St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales add many more stages or degrees, thus anticipating even in this world the "many mansions in the Father's house." "The true measure of our love of God," says St. Bernard, "is to love Him without measure."

The act most pleasing to God and most meritorious for the individual is an act of perfect love. This means that we love God above all things because He is infinitely perfect and worthy of our love, and that we are heartily sorry for ever having offended Him and determined never more to offend Him. That act of perfect love or perfect contrition washes away every stain of sin and restores the soul immediately to the friendship of God and to sanctifying grace. "If any man love me," said Jesus, "my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode in him."<sup>1</sup> This implies, of course, the intention to confess one's sins when one next goes to Confession.

### Perfect Love

When God is present in the soul, no serious sin or guilt can co-exist there. The individual who has made an act of perfect love has God dwelling within him. It is the consciousness of the sheer presence of God within the soul that fills one with perfect serenity and a peace of mind which this world cannot give. "God is love," said St. John, "and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him . . . Perfect love casts out fear, because fear hath pain."<sup>2</sup>

Such an act of perfect love is possible not only for saints and

holy people but also for the ordinary person who sincerely and earnestly tries to love God with his whole heart and to keep himself always in His love. To elicit an act it is well to kneel before a crucifix and reflect upon the immensity of God's love which prompted Him to send His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to redeem us by His death on Calvary.

How easy and natural it is to say, "My Jesus, Thou didst die for love of me. I love Thee with my whole heart and soul because thou art infinitely worthy of my love, and I shall be willing to die rather than to offend Thee again."

That is the act of perfect love and perfect contrition that one should make not only before going to Confession but also as part of one's daily prayers. Indeed, he should keep himself always in that state of perfect friendship with his Creator so that God will dwell permanently in his heart as in a holy tabernacle.

### Love Surpasses All

"The greater is our love of God," says St. Francis de Sales, "the more meritorious are our actions. God does not regard the greatness of the work so much as the love wherewith it is performed." St. Paul admonishes us that all gifts, no matter how great, and all good works and austerities are utterly worthless without charity. God works without the love

1. John 14:23

2. John 4:16-18

of God are like lamps without oil. Just as food is tasteless and insipid without a condiment, so if charity is lacking our works are without savor before God. He who loves God most will receive the greatest reward. Love is the only ladder on which we can climb from earth to Heaven.

Grievous sin alone can extinguish the love of God in our hearts. Hence it is to be avoided as the greatest evil that can befall us. "I am sure," says St. Paul, "that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God."<sup>3</sup>

In his first epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul gives us the most beautiful and penetrating exposition of the virtue of love or charity that has ever been written. By charity he means the love of God above all things and the love of neighbor for God's sake, implying an appreciation of the worth of God in Himself and in one's neighbor.

"If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels," he says, "but do not have charity, I have become a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I have prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, yet do not have charity, I am nothing. And

if I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing."

Then commenting on the self-effacing character of true charity, he continues, "Charity is patient, is kind; charity does not envy, is not pretentious, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, is not self-seeking, is not provoked; thinks no evil, does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth; bears with all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Contrasting charity with other gifts, St. Paul says: "Charity never fails, whereas prophecies will disappear, and tongues will cease, and knowledge will be destroyed. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect has come, that which is imperfect will be done away with. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away the things of a child."

Then the Apostle brings his treatment to the following glorious climax: "We see now through a mirror in an obscure manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I have been known. So there abide faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is

3. Romans 8:38



charity."<sup>4</sup> Yes, it towers up above all the virtues as Mount Everest towers above all other mountains.

### The Second Commandment

God is, of course, the primary object of our love, but it must extend likewise to our fellow men. Christ rendered this duty explicit when, after enunciating the first commandment, He added: "And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." God is our common Father, and we are all His children, and for that reason we ought to love one another as brothers. We are all made in the image of God and we must see the lineaments of the face of Christ in every man and love him for God's sake.

It is this divine endowment which constitutes the basis of the dignity of every person and makes him a being precious beyond all price: it is the basis of the spiritual kinship of all men regardless of race or color. Just as the moon derives its light from the sun, so man derives his right to respect and love from his kinship with God. Our love for God must flow out to all the creatures made in His likeness: in loving them we are also loving Him. "God being the principle of all good," points out St. Thomas Aquinas, "that which a man

loves in himself is the Divine Good communicated to him, and he loves his neighbor by reason of fellowship in that good."<sup>5</sup>

"Dearly beloved," says St. John, "let us love one another, for love is from God. And everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love . . . Beloved, if God has so loved us, we also ought to love one another."<sup>6</sup>

The Beloved Disciple then proceeds to drive this truth home in a forceful manner, saying, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar. For how can he who does not love his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see? And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also."<sup>7</sup>

The members of one's family have the first claim upon his love, for "charity begins at home," though it must not be confined there. The home in which the members reinforce their love for one another by the love of God is like the house that is built not on shifting sands but upon solid bedrock: it will withstand the tumult of the storm and the fury of all the winds that blow. The home in which a deep and abiding love prevails is a home

4. 13:1-13

5. St. Th. S.2.2,q.26,A.4,C

6. 1 John 4:7-11

7. 1 John 4: 20-21

filled with peace and happiness.

### Conjugal Love

The love of husband and wife is a sacred love, kindled by a spark from the divine love. It is a divinely implanted love which prompts a man to obey the mandate of the Most High, uttered at the dawn of creation: "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh." The union of husband and wife, raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament, is the most intimate and sacred union that can take place between two creatures.

"By matrimony," declared Pope Pius XI in his beautiful encyclical *On Christian Marriage*, "the souls of the contracting parties are joined and knit together more directly and more intimately than are their bodies, and that not by any passing affection of sense or spirit, but by a deliberate and firm act of the will, and from this union of souls, by God's decree, a sacred and inviolable bond arises." Conjugal love is thus not a mere transient emotion but a union of minds, hearts and souls, permeated by the love of God.

Emphasizing the beauty and the sanctity of that love, the Apostle Paul says: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church . . . Even

thus ought husbands also to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife, loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh; on the contrary he nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ also does the Church (because we are members of his body, made from his flesh and from his bones.)"<sup>8</sup>

The love of husband and wife, elevated on their wedding day to a sacramental dignity, should deepen and grow with the passing years and spread its lovely fragrance throughout the home. One of the greatest menaces to that love is the angry word that cuts and burns. Spoken in a moment of irritation, it hurts and humiliates the person who is the closest and dearest of all to you and sears its ugly way into the memory. It acts as a termite that eats away the foundations and pulls the shining castle of love's dream into dust and ashes.

### The Second Vow

My first sick call was to a home that was on the verge of being destroyed by strife, kindled by the angry word. "Father," said a man who called late one night at the Rectory, "my wife and I have had a violent quarrel. She is preparing to leave and it will mean the end of our marriage. Will you come and see if you can save it?"

As we walked to his home, he said, "Father, I love my wife

8. Ephesians 5:27-30

and I'm confident that she loves me. But I have an ungovernable temper and I let fly a torrent of angry words. They bring angry words in return. Then there we are—fighting like cats and dogs—we who should love each other more than any other person." He broke down and cried, his whole frame shaking with convulsive sobs as he realized the ruin that he had brought to his home.

After several hours of pleading, the wife relented and agreed to remain. They both knelt down and each repeated after me these words: "I solemnly promise on my word of honor that I shall never speak an angry, bitter or spiteful word but shall discuss all differences in a kind and affectionate manner. So help me God!" Then I had them seal their promise by kissing the crucifix on my rosary.

It enabled them to perceive, as they never had before, the menace of the angry, bitter word; and it marked the turning point in their domestic life. The experience moved me so much that I have made it a practice to propose that promise as a sort of second vow to every couple I have married over the intervening forty years.

After the wedding ceremony I take the bridal couple aside and say to them: "You have just uttered your vow of conjugal loyalty. I think it would be well to supplement that vow

with another simple one. Don't laugh at me when I tell you what it is. It's the vow not to speak harsh, bitter, angry words to each other. You love one another so much now that you can scarcely conceive of yourself doing such a thing.

But it can happen, and the best way to safeguard the beauty and integrity of your love is to promise each other on your wedding day that you will go through your whole life without marring that love with bitter, ugly words. Differences, of course, will arise, but they can always be discussed in a calm, friendly and affectionate manner. That spirit of sympathy and understanding will enable you to solve any problem, and if that spirit is lacking, no problem, no matter how small, can be properly solved."

I have never had a couple refuse to take that second vow, and I've never heard of one such marriage hitting the rocks nor even being clouded by domestic strife. Of course, a mere resolution is not a panacea for unhappy couples. There is no magic elixir for any sickness of the heart. But this simple little vow is an effective technique that safeguards the heart from its most common enemy: the angry, bitter word that smarts and stings. If this enemy is excluded, kindness, sympathy, tenderness and love will flourish and they constitute a remedy more potent than any medicine doctors can de-

wise. It's nature's remedy and God's as well.

Many have written to tell me that the second vow saved them when strife was imminent. "When you suggested that we promise not to speak angrily to each other," writes Marjorie, "Bob and I thought it was sort of silly: that we would ever be tempted to do so seemed inconceivable then. We know differently now. After the glamor of the honeymoon yielded to life's work-a-day world, each of us began to be conscious of little mannerisms and habits of the other, which got on our nerves. We're both rather high-strung and often we were on the point of 'blowing our top.' Then one of us would say softly, 'Remember our second vow.'

"Then we'd clasp hands in silence for a moment or two, and say in a calm kindly manner whatever was in our minds. It has worked like a charm. The irritation quickly passes under such treatment and we have been able to solve our problems without ever hurting one another or saying things we'd be sorry for later on. That bloom of love you spoke of on our wedding day is still there; it's made our home life beautiful, and we know we'll hold fast to it to the end. We wish others could share the secret—the precious secret—of our happiness: our love has never been sacrificed to the Moloch of the angry, spiteful world."

Marjorie's letter is typical of hundreds. That second vow is but the application of the divine command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," to the closest of all neighbors—husband and wife. I think it is well for all young couples to take that vow on their wedding day and for couples already married to promise each other this very day that they shall go through the rest of their lives without ever uttering an angry spiteful word to one another. It will keep their love untarnished and bring God's blessing on their home. Such is the transforming and uplifting power of love—its magic and its mystery.

Just as other forms of life, deprived of the sun's rays, wither and die, so human life, robbed of the sunshine of love and sympathy, loses its zest, enthusiasm and vigor. Love is the radiance which brightens the world of human existence with the warm sunshine of happiness. This thought is beautifully expressed by Francis William Bourdillon in the lines, with which I close:

The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright  
world dies  
with the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life  
dies  
When love is done.



# The Home: A Citadel Of Love

Address Delivered on June 19, 1955

In passing an art store in London one day, I happened to spy a painting which has haunted my memory ever since. It was a picture of a little thatched cottage in the English countryside. On the doorstep is seated a mother holding her babe in her arms. Back of them stands the husband looking down with tender affection upon his wife and babe. Love for each other and for the little child, which binds them more closely together, lightens the faces of each with a beautiful radiance.

Coming along the roadside are two white-robed nuns who turn to gaze upon the tender scene. Then one of them remarks, "Ah, Sister! There too is a sanctuary."

Yes, every home should be a sanctuary, an ark of the Covenant, a house of God, and a gateway to Heaven. It should be a citadel of love, and we propose to show how the twofold commandment to love God and one's neighbor may be best fulfilled therein. From the Christian home as from a wellspring love will flow out and leaven all of society.

"A dining room table," observes Simeon Strunsky, "with children's eager, hungry faces around it, ceases to be a mere dining room table, and becomes an altar." Christ should be the

head of every home, the witness of every deed, the auditor of every spoken word, and the reader of every thought that stirs in the silent kingdom of the soul.

The home should be distinguished above all by a spirit of love which binds husband, wife and children in the closest union that exists upon this earth. Conjugal love transforms two persons who were probably complete strangers for the first eighteen or twenty years of their lives into the most intimate and dearest of friends — making them one in mind, heart, body and soul. Obviously the divine command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," applies with peculiar and unique force to husband and wife and to their offspring.

## Cure for Delinquency

By words and deeds of sympathy, kindness and affection they must strive each day to deepen and strengthen the love, which was consecrated by a vow on their wedding day, until it becomes the most beautiful, tender and sacred love of their lives. They will do this best by twining their love around the love of God as the fragile vine twines its tendrils around the stalwart oak and thus withstands all the winds that blow. Conjugal love which warms itself at the fire of divine love

will never grow cold. God will be with them in the bright morning of their journey, at high noontide and when the shadows of evening lengthen around them.

Parents are under a divine obligation to love their children and to rear them in the fear and love of God. "But if anyone does not take care of his own," says St. Paul, "and especially of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."<sup>1</sup> Parents are a child's best teachers, and the lessons he learns at a mother's knee are the ones which he is most likely to carry to the journey's end. "Train up a child in the way he should go," says the Book of Proverbs, "and when he is old, he will not depart from it."<sup>2</sup>

The only real cure for juvenile delinquency consists in proper parental care and direction. "A return to old fashioned home and Church life," says J. Edgar Hoover, "is essential if we are to provide an effective remedy for juvenile delinquency." Parents must teach their children by precept and train them by example.

### Carving A Masterpiece

One day Michelangelo was passing along one of the streets of Florence when he saw a large block of Carrara marble lying in the gutter. It had been hacked

and cut by an unskilled sculptor and thrown away as worthless. Michelangelo had it brought to his studio and there he labored for months, carving that marble into the likeness of the youthful King David. When the statue was first unveiled it created a sensation. It seems to be instinct with the very breath of life. Indeed, when the sculptor had finally completed it, he approached it and, striking it with his mallet, cried, "Speak! Speak!" For centuries it has stood there in the Pitti Palace, speaking its message of beauty, perfection to all visitors. It has been acclaimed as one of the great masterpieces of all time.

Parents, however, are called upon to achieve a still greater transformation and a still greater masterpiece. They take a babe, unable to utter a word or lift a finger to help itself and over the years they transform it into a well-trained child, fashioned into the image of God. They transform the veined marble of flesh and blood into a living masterpiece which will dwarf into insignificance any inanimate statue of marble.

Thus are parents designed by God to be the greatest of all sculptors, and woe unto them if they waste their opportunity and turn out a spoiled product. "What is more noble," asks St. John Chrysostom, "than to form the minds of youth? He who fashions the morals of children performs a task in my judgment

1 1 Timothy 5:8

2 22:6

more sublime than that of any painter or sculptor."

One of the most beloved of all the kings of France is Louis IX, who was elevated to sainthood. Knowing all the temptations which would surround him when he would be on the throne, his saintly mother, Queen Blanche, said to him when he was a child of twelve: "Louis, my son, I love you most dearly, but sooner would I see you a corpse at my feet, and France bereft of an heir to the throne, than have you commit one mortal sin." Louis never forgot those words.

If Queen Blanche, in spite of the engrossing duties of state, could pay so much attention to the religious training of her son, surely the mothers of today in the private walks of life can do as much. Though their sons may not ascend the thrones of Kings, they can ascend the thrones of high citizenship, honest and faithful in the discharge of all their duties. There is more truth than poetry in the saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world."

### Family Prayer

Workers in large factories and dwellers in cities are daily breathing an atmosphere laden with smoke, soot and dust. After many years their lungs become discolored by the defilement which seeps in unknowingly upon them. So likewise are

dwellers in our cities exposed to a pagan atmosphere which tends to leave its mark upon their hearts. The home must be alive to this danger and seek by positive and vigorous measures to counteract its debilitating influence. Parents must strive to keep the souls of their children white and clean and delicately sensitive to God's holy laws.

One of the practices that will help to do this is family prayer. "Where two or three are gathered together for my sake," said Jesus, "there am I in the midst of them."<sup>3</sup> In a pastoral letter our bishops declare: "We heartily commend the beautiful practice of family prayer . . . The presence of Jesus will surely be a source of blessing to the home where parents and children unite to offer up prayer in common. The spirit of piety which this custom develops will sanctify the bonds of family love and ward off the dangers which often bring sorrow and shame."

The experience of the Church the world over testifies abundantly to the profound influence of family prayer in preserving the faith intact, in stimulating Christians to lives of virtue and holiness, and in keeping alive in them the consciousness of the abiding presence of God. For this reason the practice of saying grace aloud before and after all the meals should be observed in every home.

Especially commendable is the custom of reciting together immediately after the evening

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 18:20

meal the rosary. The rosary may well be called the thermometer of Christianity. Where it is used, Christianity is flourishing; where it is neglected, Christianity falls to a low ebb. Pope Pius IX was accustomed to say: "In the whole of the Vatican there is no greater treasurer than the rosary. If you desire peace in your hearts, in your homes, in your country, assemble every evening to recite the rosary. These are my last words to you: the memorial I leave behind me."

Father Abram J. Ryan, poet-priest of the South, expressed in poetic form what the rosary means to all who make it their daily prayer:

Sweet blessed beads! I would  
not part  
With one of you for  
richest gem  
That gleams in kingly  
diadem;  
You know the history of  
my heart.

#### **Family Holy Communion**

Another means by which parents can help to fashion their children into the image of Jesus is that of receiving together frequent and even daily Holy Communion. No influence is so powerful in strengthening one to live a good and holy life as the practice of frequently receiving our Eucharistic Lord. In Holy Communion the Bread of Angels becomes our daily bread and the manna for our hungry souls.

An omnipotent God can bestow no greater gift upon mortal man. How can any family grow more deeply in the love of God than by opening the door of their hearts frequently, at least weekly, to Him in Holy Communion?

Closely associated with the custom of frequent Holy Communion is, of course, attendance at weekday Mass. The great gift of the Holy Eucharist comes to us through the sacrifice of the Mass. The individual who assists at Mass devoutly offers up to almighty God the same infinite Victim Who was immolated on Calvary's Cross. The Mass is therefore the supreme act of adoration, thanksgiving, supplication and atonement. Parents who wish to keep the love of God burning in their hearts and in the hearts of their children will not fail to attend Mass together on one or more weekdays each week.

To create the proper atmosphere a crucifix and holy pictures should adorn the walls of the Christian home. Especially appropriate are pictures of the Holy Family and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Pope Leo XII requested that all Christian families be consecrated to the Holy Family and model their home after that of Jesus, Mary and Joseph at Nazareth.

The enthronement of the Sacred Heart should be made in every home. This consists in setting up a picture of the Sac-



red Heart with appropriate prayers, and in consecrating the family to the Sacred Heart in permanent recognition of His Kingship over the home. Surely the daily sight of the heart which loved man even unto death will keep aflame the love of God and of one another in our own hearts.

### Source of Strength

God is the source both of the stability of a home and of its happiness. "Our home joys," observes Johann Pestalozzi, "are the most delightful earth affords, and the joy of parents in their children is the most holy joy of humanity. It makes their hearts pure and good; it lifts men up to their Father in heaven."

That which constitutes the atmosphere of the home, making it so dear and precious to all, is the spirit of love that hovers over it and binds together all its members with bonds stronger than steel. In that constant and abiding love one senses most clearly the presence of God in the home. "God is love," says St. John, "and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."<sup>4</sup>

The love of a youth for a maid is sometimes fickle and uncertain. But the love of father and mother for their children and for each other increases with the years. Spring passes, but autumn brings a richer

beauty. It is on this note that Eugene O'Neil ends his play *Ah! Wilderness*:

Standing for a moment in the full moonlight, Miller puts his arm around his wife Essie, and seeing his love-struck son Richard, says in a low voice:

"There he is—like a statue of Love's Young Dream."

Then he sighs and speaks with a gentle nostalgic melancholy:

"What's it that the Rubaiyat says:

"'Yet, ah, that spring should vanish with the rose!

That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!'"

Then throwing off his melancholy, he says, with a loving smile at his wife:

"Well, spring isn't everything, is it, Essie? There's a lot to be said for autumn. That's got beauty, too. And winter — if you're together."

Ah! Yes, *if you're together!* No matter what winds may blow, the family bound together by the strong bond of the love of God and of one another will remain intact. It is like the house that is built upon the rock.

### The Supreme Achievement

We have indicated how parents can show their love for their children by making their home a house of God, where love characterizes the relations

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:16

5 1:8

of all the members of the family. We should balance the picture by pointing out that children too have duties. "Honor thy father and thy mother," is the command of God Himself. Children must honor, love and obey their parents in all that is not sin.

Hear the instruction of thy father," warns the Book of Proverbs, "and forsake not the law of thy mother,"<sup>5</sup> To the same effect are the words of St. Paul: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for that is right. 'Honor thy father and thy mother'—such is the first commandment with a promise—that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest be long-lived upon the earth.'"<sup>6</sup>

All too often sons and daughters realize how much they owe to their parents only after they have passed away. Then their eyes moisten and a lump forms in their throats as they say, "How I wish I could show them how much I appreciate all that they have done for me and how much I really love them." Far better than to place flowers on their graves is to show your love for them now, while they are still living. God will richly reward the children who

honor and obey their parents and love them next to God.

The building of a stable home where peace, joy and love abide constitutes the supreme achievement in life. No other enterprise can compare with it in importance to the individual and to society. Neither can success in business or politics, in social or professional life or in any other field, act as a substitute for failure in the building of a stable and happy home. Fame and loneliness are sorry substitutes for domestic happiness, the essence of which is the enduring love of one's family.

To the parents and the children of America, I say in closing: "Make your home a house of God and a gateway to Heaven. Make it a citadel of love, where you fulfill the twofold command to love God with your whole heart and soul and your neighbor as yourself. Make it a shrine of holiness where young lips lisp the sweet name of Jesus and dwell in the companionship of the saints and angels, touching earth with their feet but heaven with their heads. In such a home you will best learn the meaning of those words of the Beloved Disciple, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

<sup>6</sup> Epesians 6:1-3

# The Mark Of A Christian

Address Delivered on June 26, 1955

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" This question, put to Jesus by the doctor of the law, looks innocent enough, but in reality is loaded. The rabbinical commentators had teased out of the Mosaic law no less than 613 ceremonial and moral precepts. Some of these were styled *heavy* and others *light*, and bitter controversies raged as to which was the most important.

Slashing like a scythe through massive weeds, Jesus cuts through the confused tangled mass of casuistic controversy and sums up "the whole law and the prophets" in the two-fold command: Love God with your whole heart and for His sake love your neighbor as yourself. This is the Gospel which Jesus preached in season and out of season and which He exemplified each day of His life, He lifted the term "neighbor" from its narrow meaning of a member of the same tribe or clan to any human being.

To His disciples Jesus said: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; that as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."<sup>1</sup> This is the mark which is forever to dis-

tinguish His disciples, the un-failing credential by which they are to be recognized. So earnestly did the early Christians strive to fulfill this commandment that the Romans were wont to say, "See these Christians! How they love one another."

Reflecting the supreme importance Christ attached to this commandment, St. Paul declares: For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if you bite and devour one another, take heed or you will be consumed by one another."<sup>2</sup> Hence it is only when we strive with undiscourageable good will, day in and day out, to love one another that we are worthy of the name of Christians.

## Love Your Enemies

It is not too difficult to love those near and dear to us, those who are pleasant and agreeable to us and who love us. It is more difficult, however, to love those who are unattractive, disagreeable, who irritate, hate and hurt us. But even these we are called upon by Christ to love.

"You have heard," declared Jesus, "that it was said, 'An eye for an eye,' and, 'A tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you not to resist the evildoer; on the con-

<sup>1</sup> John 13:34-35

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 5:14-15

trary, if someone strikes thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would go to law with thee and take thy tunic, let him take thy cloak as well; and whoever forces thee to go for one mile, go with him two."<sup>3</sup>

Does this sound like a strange and revolutionary doctrine? Yes, and it is. When it fell from the Savior's lips in the Sermon on the Mount it must have seemed incredibly strange to His hearers; even after the lapse of nineteen centuries it still seems strange. Yet there is no mistaking Christ's meaning, for He then proceeded to reiterate it with unequivocal clarity.

"You have heard," He continued, "that it was said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and shalt hate thy enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, who makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans do that? And if you salute your brethren only, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do that? You therefore

are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>4</sup>

This is not easy to do. It goes against the grain of our fallen human nature which clamors for vengeance and returns blow for blow and hate for hatred. But it is only in proportion as we go against the grain of the old Adam and rise above the instinctive urge for vengeance that we are worthy to be called followers of Christ. It is the unfailing mark of a true Christian.

### True Love

True, it may be psychologically impossible to have an emotional fondness for some people, especially for those who irritate, hate, hurt and persecute us. But, as we have previously pointed out, love is not to be identified exclusively with such an instinctive or emotional reaction. Love is rooted in the rational will, and hence it is always possible to wish and to will the deepest welfare, happiness and the eternal salvation of every person, be he friend or foe, and to strive to assist him in the attainment of those great goods.

That is true and effective love; it is love not "in word or in tongue," as St. John says, "but in deed and in truth." How can anyone prove his love more effectively than by striving to help an individual achieve the greatest values in life and in eternity? By smothering our resentment, choking the instinc-

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:38-41

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 43-48



tive clamor for vengeance, crowding back the hatred, and reaching out a hand to a brother in need, we demonstrate our love for him most authentically. Back of his scowling countenance we see the lineaments of the face of Christ and we seek to free the divine image within him from the fetters of hatred and sin. Surely that is love "in deed and in truth."

Thus far we have set forth the teaching of Christ concerning the great commandment. We shall now show how it has been put into practice. Katherine Drexel of Philadelphia was a young lady of great wealth and social prestige: every door eagerly opened to welcome her. A life of ease and pleasure in high society stretched out before her. But upon learning of the plight of the Indians, the pitiful lack of schools and teachers, she took their cause to heart.

In the 1880's she traveled through the entire Indian country, covering more miles than St. Paul did in all his voyages. She journeyed by stagecoach, canoe, horseback or burro, staying overnight in primitive mission stations or ruder inns, that she might help those who needed it most. She poured out millions to build schools for them. She journeyed to Rome and pleaded with Pope Leo XIII to send them devoted Sisters to spend their lives in teaching and caring for them.

Looking at her with his piercing eyes, the venerable Pontiff replied, "Why not become a Sister yourself, my child, and minister to them?" The challenge stirred her deeply. It was one thing to give her millions; it was another thing to give herself. She decided to give both.

Founding the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, Mother Katherine Drexel devoted her talents, her wealth, her unbounded love and her life to these underprivileged people. For sixty-five years she labored among them, bringing to them the tenderness and the love of Christ.

At her death on March 3, 1955 at the age of 96, 63 schools and institutions and one university, scattered over 21 states and staffed by 501 of her Sisters, stood as living monuments to her Christlike love for people who have so often been the victims of the white man's prejudice and hate. There were tears in the eyes of a million Negroes and a hundred thousand Indians when they learned that the big-hearted Sister, whom they loved as a mother, was no longer among them.

### Rose Hawthorne

Not less striking is the case of Rose Hawthorne, the daughter of the noted American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Along with her husband, George Parsons Lathrop, assistant editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, she em-

braced the Catholic faith. Upon learning from a Paulist Father the desperate plight of a cancer patient, at whose bedside he has just ministered, Rose determined to visit her. She found a woman of refinement, left without money and without friends, who had become a city charge at Blackwell's Island. Soon she was ministering to her and to other needy victims of incurable cancer.

Shortly after the death of her husband she founded in 1889 an order of Sisters, known as Servants of Relief for Incurable Cancer. She established in New York St. Rose's Free Home for Incurable Cancer and later Rosary Hill Home in Hawthorne, New York. "I am trying," she said, "to serve the poor as a servant. I wish to serve the cancerous poor because they are avoided more than any other class of sufferers."

Often she would arise at night to attend the sick and the dying and to speak a word of comfort and of love to them when their pains became intense. Virtually every patient felt the warm clasp of her hand as his life ebbed away amid the soft gentle murmur of her prayers. A member of one of the most distinguished families in America, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop was putting into practice the words of our Blessed Lord when He said: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another." As the recipients of her love, she chose

not her social equals but the poor and the abandoned, victims of one of the most painful of all human afflictions.

Katherine Drexel and Rose Hawthorne Lathrop reached up gentle hands to take the glorious ideal of love of neighbor out of the blue of the skies and weave it into the warp and woof of their daily lives. They demonstrated what rich and glorious fruits are achieved when human life is motivated by a generous and unselfish love. In a world like ours such persons of undiscourageable good will and unfailing love are, in the words of George Eliot, like "a fine quotation from the Bible . . . in a paragraph of today's newspaper." Their lives show that love is the strongest force in the world. As Shakespeare said, love is

. . . An ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and  
is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark.

**St. Francis of Assisi.**

"If we love one another," says the Beloved Disciple John, "God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His spirit. And we have seen, and do testify, that the Father hath sent His Son to be Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. And we have come to

know, and have believed, the love that God has in our behalf. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

These are the words upon which St. Francis of Assisi often meditated and which he sought to put into daily practice. As a youth Francis Bernadone was a fastidious dresser, a courtier of pleasure, a suitor of beauty, eager for fun and merriment. As he was riding across the Umbrian plain, he met a ragged leper begging alms. Putting the spurs into his steed, he turned his face away to escape the repulsive sight. Then suddenly he heard a voice whispering, "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me."<sup>5</sup>

Reining in his steed, he returned and dismounted. Taking the golden florins from his silken waistcoat, he put them in the beggar's outstretched hand. Then as he took him in his arms he said, "You are my brother and I love you as Christ does."

It was the most difficult thing Francis had ever done; but it marked the turning point in his life. He had found his client and his life work. He renounced all riches that he might dedicate himself to the poor, the sick and the lepers. His bride henceforth was Lady Poverty; even the clothes on

his back he gave away. With a cloak given to him by the Bishop of Assisi, he went off into the woods of Mount Subassia, singing for joy. All the things of nature—the wind, the sun, the sky, the flowers, grass and trees, the birds and beasts of the field—were his possessions now, his "brothers and sisters," and God was his love supreme.

### God-intoxicated Man

So filled with love did he become that he has been called the "God-intoxicated man." His love of God and of all His creatures flowed from him in words so tender that they seem like lyrics of love. The prayer which he gave to the world is commonly ranked by people of all faiths as second only to The Lord's Prayer.

"Lord," prayed Francis, "make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

"O Divine Master, grant that I may not seek so much to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Recalling the poverty of Jesus

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:45

and His burial in a borrowed grave, Francis prayed, "O poorest Jesus, the grace I beg of Thee is to bestow on me the treasure of the highest poverty. Grant that the distinctive mark of our Order may be never to possess as its own anything under the sun for the glory of Thy Name." The Franciscan Order, which encircles the globe like a beautiful rosary of self-effacing love, is the lengthened shadow of the personality of its Christlike founder, the Poverello of Assisi.

True to his injunctions, it will be found not among the rich and powerful, but among the poor, the afflicted and the lowly. Thus did Francis weave into the tapestry of the world's culture and civilization the golden thread of Christ's law of love: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." More than any other man since the time of Christ, Francis has taught us to see in the ragged poor, in the leper, and in all the afflicted the lineaments of the face of Jesus and to love them as our brothers.

### Love Conquers All

"How lonely we are in the world," remarked Thackeray. "You and I are but a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow-islands a little more or less near to us." But this is not the society of Christians wherein

each man is a brother, full of solicitude and love for all. "We are," as St. Paul tells, "all members one of another."<sup>6</sup> This union is further deepened by our common membership in the Mystical Body of Christ: He is the head and we are the members.

During a serious illness John Donne, the English poet, hearing the death bell tolling for another, remarked: "The Church is Catholic, universal, so are all her actions, all that she does belongs to all . . . Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon occasion rings? But who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world? No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

"Love your enemies," said Jesus, "do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you." Yes, the best way both morally and psychologically, to overcome one's enemies is to love them. Lincoln perceived this truth and practiced it. At a dinner in Washington, he spoke kindly and even in endearing terms of some of the Confederates.

"I am surprised, Mr. President," said an elderly lady nearby, "to hear you speak of our enemies in such a kind way. I should think you would seek to destroy them instead of trying to love them."

<sup>6</sup> Romans 12:5



"But don't I destroy them as enemies," replied Lincoln, "when I make them our friends?"

Such a procedure is not only good Christianity but good statesmanship as well.

An even more striking illustration of this teaching of Jesus was given by a priest during the Civil War in Spain. At Saragossa the communists were leading a group of priests and brothers to a place outside the city where they were to be shot.

Turning to his Red captor, an elderly priest said, "Will you please cut these ropes from my hands that I may bless you?"

"Yes," sneered the communist, "I'll cut them off you all right," as he seized his sword and hacked off the priest's hands.

Then raising those bleeding stumps aloft and tracing with them the Sign of the Cross, the priest said slowly, "God . . .

God . . . forgive you, and bless you, and love you . . . as I do!"

Probably no more striking fulfillment of Christ's command to love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you was given since Jesus, dying on the Cross, raised His eyes to Heaven and prayed for His executioners, saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Let us, in closing, write on the tablets of our hearts and memories the words of Jesus:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself. This is the law of the prophets . . . A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you." Yes, the love of God and of our neighbor is the only ladder by which one can climb from earth to heaven — the golden ladder of love that never faileth.

## 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.

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