

The Message of Love

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Summary: A Christmas-time reflection on the state of the world torn by the Korean war and poverty in the midst of plenty in the United States. Points to the Gospel message of peace, love of enemies, and love of one another—"It is the only word for Christmas when love came down to the mire, to teach us that love."
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We do not stand in high places like Joseph in Egypt, like Mordecai and Daniel, the advisers of Kings. We do not know the Stalins, the Churchills and the Trumans of this world and no one is waiting for our words on the great and weighty questions of the day as they wait on the words of these others to hear their fate. We would rather be like the Joseph who found a birthplace for Jesus in a stable, who fled into Egypt (at the bidding of an angel) and lived in a foreign land and was a d.p.[displaced person] and worked with his hands for his bread.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, lived for 33 years in an occupied country, Archbishop Byrnes said once. He didn't lead any Underground movement. Of course, he said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," we have heard that often enough. But St. Hilary interprets that to mean that if we have little of Caesar we don't have to render very much to him.

Plato wrote of the two cities, the city of the poor and the city of the rich and that was the way he divided the world.

St. Augustine wrote of the city of God.

To which city do we belong?

There are two billion people in the world and if we believed all we read in the paper everyone must line up on the side of Communism or Americanism, Catholicism, Capitalism, which the most Catholic newspapers would have us believe are synonymous. Of course, there are bad Americans, bad Catholics and bad capitalists, but still, they say, you can't print such holy pictures as you have in this Christmas issue in Russia, and you can't oppose war and the draft and taxes, as you do, without being thrown into concentration camps, if you are in Russia or a satellite country.

It is not avoiding the question, and it is being eminently realistic and practical to repeat, to affirm, that we are on the side of the poor. And who would not

want to be?

"Blessed are the poor!... Fear not, little flock. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body... Not a sparrow is forgotten in God's sight... nation will rise against nation.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who calumniate you. And to him who strikes thee on one cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away thy cloak, do not withhold thy tunic also. Give to everyone that asks of thee and from him who takes away thy goods, ask no return. And even as you wish men to do to you, so also do you to them. And if you love those who love you, what merit have you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you what merit have you? For even sinners do that. But love your enemies and do good and lend, not hoping for any return and your reward shall be great, and you shall be children of the Most High. For He is kind to the ungrateful and evil. Be merciful even as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and ye shall not be judged. Do not condemn and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you shall be forgiven, give and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they pour into your lap. For what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you."

It is all such a strange doctrine, so upside down, so contrary to the world we live in, so impossible to practice, so they say. Who are the poor? They are our soldiers in Korea fighting in zero weather, thousands of them suffering and tortured and dying. How many casualties are there since June 25?

They are the Koreans themselves, north and south, who have been bombed out, burnt out in the rain of fire from heaven.

"You do not know of what spirit you are," our Lord said when his apostles urged that fire from heaven would come down on the hostile country. Forty thousand bombs were dropped on a city of 45,000. Who made up that city? Men, women and children, the old and the sick and the crippled. The innocent, the noncombatant in other words. A thousand guerilla soldiers were "fried" the World Telegram quoted a soldier, when jellied gasoline was dropped on them, to "mop them up." God have mercy on them all and those who killed them as well as those who died!

And these men are our brothers, made to the image and likeness of God, temples of the Holy Ghost.

Not only is the Gospel message a strange one, but the words of the Mass, of the Office of the day. We who are Catholics are supposed to be saying each morning, "I will go into the altar of God, unto God who gives joy to my youth!"

The office of the Dead begins Matins with “Come let us rejoice unto the Lord, let us shout with joy to God the Rock of our salvation.”

And today on the feast of St. Andrew, we read how he shouted with joy. “Hail, O Cross, thou art hallowed by the body of Christ; his members adorn thee as with pearls. O good Cross, made glorious and beautiful by the body of my Lord; welcome me from among men and join me again to my master.”

One of the saddest and sorriest things about poverty is the envy, hatred, venom and despair suffered by the poor. It is part of their suffering.

There are two billion people in the world today, and 150 million of these are Americans who boast of the highest standard of living, forgetting their migrants, tenants, wage slaves. The war is supposed to have cost us two trillion dollars in money spent and property damage. We continue to spend as from a bottomless reservoir.

Last night Dean Acheson spoke of the strategy we needed to develop in this crisis and he stressed again point four of President Truman’s program, the economic rehabilitation of the world, the help to the diseased and poverty stricken of every area, South America, South Africa, India, Iran, Iraq, etc. Such help when suggestions were brought before Congress has already been whittled down to appropriations of 30 million dollars, a nothing in the face of the problem and the billions spoken of for defense. Walter Reuther, labor leader, and Senator McMahon have suggested sums more in keeping with the generosity of America. Reuther’s estimate, I believe, was ten billion a year for twenty years. These are brave words and brave thoughts. Yesterday the British made similar proposals.

Personal responsibility was also stressed last night in Dean Acheson’s talk.

On this we can indeed be united, in a desire, backed up by work, to strip ourselves, to give and give and give, to every appeal made, to the Bishops, to Monsignor Swannstrom’s for the War Relief Services, all the appeals that come to us through our churches, and daily in our hour by hour contact with others. It is the only way we can try to approach poverty which is so blessedly our Lord.

In our eulogies of poverty which we have printed again and again in **The Catholic Worker**, one of which is running in this issue of the paper, we write with the recognition that we stand as Americans, representing in the eyes of the world the richest nation on earth. What does it matter that we live with the poor, with those of the skid rows, and that those in our other houses throughout the country are living with poverty which is so great a scandal in a land of plenty. We know that we can never attain to the poverty of the destitute around us. We awake with it in our ears in the morning, listening to the bread line forming under our window, and we see it lined up even on such a day as the gale of last Saturday when glass and tin and bricks were flying down the street.

The only way we can make up for it is by giving of our time, our strength, our cheerfulness, our loving kindness, our gentleness to all. We have to overcome our Leon Bloy tendencies to bitterness and recrimination.

Let us pray that we do not hear our Lord call out to us, “Woe unto you rich!”
“Woe unto you who judge!”

What are we to do? Young men in the draft age feel caught and torn in their humility and in their desire to share the sufferings of others, and in their very real desire to fight the gigantic evils of this world under what ever name they are called. Some of them are having the grace to resist, to oppose the draft, to oppose participation in fruitless slaughter. But if they do it with pride, with condemnation of others, with bitterness, then their stand is questionable also. It is true they will suffer with bitterness, and even the little Flower herself said that bitterness was a part of suffering that made it harder. If they are jailed there are plenty of opportunities for the works of mercy in jail among the poor there. They will be even more on the side of the poor.

If they obey the call as we have seen quite a number go, against their convictions, let us pray that they have opportunity to minister to the suffering. There is no due deliberation and full consent of the will in wartime, but a blind instinct for self preservation. We can make no judgements on the armies involved, but on war itself, the means used of atomic warfare, obliteration bombing, the ever increasing use of destruction to wipe out ideas, philosophies. We can quote Ezekiel who wrote “Woe to the Shepherds who do not feed their sheep the gospel of peace.”

It grows ever harder to talk of love in the face of a scorning world. We have not begun to learn the meaning of love, the strength of it, the joy of it. And I am afraid we are not going to learn it from reading the daily papers or considering the struggles that are taking place on the other side of the world and in the United Nations halls here at home.

We are the little ones, and we can only pray to the saints of our days, the little saints, to disclose to us this hidden world of the Gospel, this Hidden God, this pearl of great price, this kingdom of heaven within us. It is only then can we learn about love and rejoicing, and it is the meaning of life and its reward.

We talk of one world, and our common humanity, and the brotherhood of man, of principles of justice and freedom which befits the dignity of man, but from whence does he derive this dignity but that he is the son of God?

The one lesson which is reiterated over and over again is that we are one, we pray to be one, we want to love and suffer for each other, so let us pray and do penance in each little way that is offered us through the days, and God will then give us a heart of flesh to take away our heart of stone and with our prayers we can save all those dying each day, knowing that God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Lest these words which I write on my knees be scorned, know they are St. John’s words, the apostle of love, who lived to see “charity grow cold” and who never ceased to cry out “my children, love one another.”

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that love.