

Sermon Cards

A. Crying Need

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

In common with several thousand others addicted to the pernicious habit of public speaking, I made a discourse on Mother's Day. Like most speakers on that occasion I took for subject the supremacy of the domestic virtues as the only guarantee of national survival. National survival is not the survival of the nation but of civilization depends upon the practice of domestic virtues. More than upon patriotism; unless under the word "patriotism" you include devotion to the family. More than upon military power; you can win a battle or even win a war by force of arms, and yet lose the nation unless the family is sound.

Sometimes in a talk of that kind I have quoted the figures of a famous statistician on the annihilating results of "race suicide." That, by the way, is the only honest phrase to express the evil. "Birth control" is a euphemism, and so is "planned parenthood" and so is "limitation of offspring." These expressions are dishonest. They are "nice" phrases for something that is far from "nice"; unless something can be nice and nasty at the same time.

But let that pass. I wasn't really talking on Mother's Day about race suicide but about respect for woman, concern for the family as a natural and a sacred institution, reverence for marriage and for marital virtue.

In all that, of course, there is nothing new. But the particular point I tried to make on that occasion and would like to repeat here is that no one in high position in public life has been speaking these necessary platitudes. No senator, no congressman, no governor of a state, at least no one in those categories who has a big name and a nation-wide audience. No one in all the various bureaus and branches of the federal administration has been summoning the nation to practice domestic virtue as an essential means to national survival. The subject of family, marriage, childbirth, the sacredness of the marital relationship, the evil of divorce and the viciousness of "birth control" has been left largely to ministers of religion, and indeed almost exclusively to the Catholic clergy. We do not want a monopoly of that subject. People discount our utterances on these matters. What we want is a ringing utterance again and again by some one who is sure of sixty or eighty or a hundred million listeners, and whose prestige is so great that his words produce nationwide results. Mother's Day would have been a fine opportunity, but as far as I know, it was permitted to pass. Don't write in and tell me that you heard a beautiful sermon on marriage and the family and motherhood on Mother's Day and that I'm right. What I'm talking about is the fact that something important like this should be talked about these things. It should be talked at a Communion Breakfast. It should be talked to a limited audience don't really "go anywhere." The nation goes on killing itself off in spite of us priests.

Such was the theme of that Mother's Day talk. Six days later my eyes fell upon these words written by a columnist in a New York newspaper: "We think it would be sounder policy for the government to encourage larger families, or at least not to encourage childlessness by a tax premium. No nation with a declining birth rate can hope to hold its place in this tough world very long. There is more than a wise-crack in the saying that 'French boys failed before France's arms failed.'"

"Small favors gratefully received." That sentence isn't much but it may be the first sign of the breakdown of a conspiracy of silence. The writer of it was not concerned about the religious or even the moral phase of the problem. His subject was taxation, and in particular the complaint of a friend who he said was "the proud but harassed father of six young children," who considers himself penalized under the new Morgenthau plan. His point seems well taken and his figures are correct," says the columnist, who then proceeds to demonstrate that the figures are correct. In the midst of that demonstration the sentence on the declining birth rate was thrown off, as it were, in passing.

One more circumstance prevents my rejoicing over-much about that little journalistic piece. Its author is Walker Stone who for the first time, as far as I know, had Westbrook Pegler's place in the World-Telegram syndicate. I think he will not hold it against me if I confess that to me he is a stranger. I hope he will go on, accumulate prestige, develop a great following, and as he becomes famous, not drop the subject of race-suicide. But even a very popular newspaper columnist will not be the ideal advocate of domestic morality as a means to national survival. What we want is some one who can catch the attention of every citizen of the United States. Some one to compare with Patrick Henry on Revolution, Daniel Webster on Union, or Harriet Beecher Stowe on Slavery. May his appearance be not too long delayed. Even a short delay may be too long. The appeal that we need above all is to the sanctity of the home, of the marriage relationship and the family. We don't get it we are done for.

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Library Signpost

Friendships On Parnassus

By Rev. Benedict Ehmans

Tom Seahill, director of the St. Joseph House of Hospitality, has read Raissa Maritain's new book two times, and tells us here why we should read it at least once. It is a book of fire with Pentecostal flames.

We Have Been Friends Together, by Raissa Maritain. (Longmans)

This is the story of the Maritains' search for Truth and of the friends who helped them on the way. These two ideas form the dominant theme of the book. As Raissa writes in her preface: "Our friends are a part of our life, and our life explains our friendships." And in another part "However much all my memories well up in me, as I summon them before me, and come to life with the fresh colors of long ago, here I must admit it is no longer possible for me to live over again with the same intensity the deep distress of my heart, fainting with hunger and thirst after truth."

The rest of the book is a beautiful and moving account of the Maritains' healing of their "metaphysical anguish," intimately woven with a beautiful treatment of friendship, not considered abstractly, but as seen in Raissa's description of their relations with their friends and the influence of these friends on their spiritual development.

The book is more than a record of the Maritains' conversion. It is a description of "an epoch of great spiritual renewal at the brink of the decline of a world" and of the personalities "whose influence was to be so great in France and in the world: Bergson, Leon Bloy, Peguy, Palchari" and greatest of all, the Maritains themselves. It is at the very moment when the right and just tendencies are beginning to gain the upper hand that the weight of the old errors ends by tearing apart the fabric which they had little by little worn thin. The "old errors" are seen enshrined at the Sorbonne, where the false doctrines of positivism, mechanism, materialism, relativism, and skepticism held full sway; where metaphysics was contemptuously dismissed as "mysticism"; where the validity of the human reason, and the objective reality of all knowledge which goes beyond the cognition of sensible phenomena was denied, where Raissa met Jacques who was to become the foremost champion of Christian Thought.

Of the meeting with Jacques one can only say: "Read it for yourself." After describing this meeting with the greatest of her friends, Raissa writes of their first friends, Ernest Psichari and Charles Peguy. Of Peguy who published the influential Cahiers de la Quinzaine, Raissa writes: "Above all Peguy broke with the Sorbonne which he looked upon as the citadel of all the errors in the modern world. One fact is sure, the conflict between Peguy's bookshop and the Sorbonne was one of the most important spiritual events in France in the days before the first world war." Moreover it was Peguy who, having seen that the Maritains were completely disillusioned by the failure of their professors to teach them the meaning of life, introduced them to Bergson. As Raissa writes: "We had just made an accounting of all that our professors had given us as provision for life's journey and we saw that what we held in our hands was but death and dust. It was then that God's pity caused us to find Henri Bergson." Bergson restored to the Maritains the hope of truly, absolutely, knowing what is. Though they were later to "part company" with

Bergson on some points, it was he who supplied them with the very possibility of metaphysical work. Though Bergson did not lead them to the Truth he opened the door through which they must and did pass to attain it.

The spiritual development of the Maritains is further advanced by their meeting with Leon Bloy. "At a moment when everything filled us with despair we had placed our confidence in the unknown (which we did not think of in capital letters). We had decided to extend existence credit, in the hope that it would reveal new values to us, values which could give a meaning to life—and here is what life brought us! First Bergson, and then Leon Bloy. . . Leon Bloy who for many years had lived united to his God by an indestructible love which he knew to be eternal in its essence. Life cast him upon our shores like a legendary treasure—immense and mysterious." Bloy presented to the Maritains the reality of Christianity. It was Bloy who introduced them to the saints, especially the mystics. It was Bloy, who, under God, was to be the principal occasion of their conversion to Catholicism.

On the Feast of Saint Parnabas in the year 1907, Jacques and Raissa asked and received the virtue of Faith, from the Church of God: "We were baptized, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Leon Bloy being our godfather. . . An immense peace descended upon us, bringing with it the treasures of Faith. There were no more questions, no more anguish, no more trials—there was only the definite answer of God. The Church kept her promise. And it is she whom we first loved. It is through her that we have known Christ." The rest is an account of Jacques' studies at Heidenberg and the beginning of his career as an independent philosopher. "A slow ripening process was thus made possible, during which the principal outlines of a philosophy of being and of spirit took shape before his eyes, and also the conviction that truth, attained in any degree whatever of reality, should be the friend and companion of the truth in any other degree of being. The Angel of the Schools (St. Thomas Aquinas) could now unveil his presence to this mind silently prepared to receive the eternal message of the intelligence and of faith." Jacques himself wrote: "Thenceforth, in affirming to myself without chicanery or diminution, the authentic value as reality of our human instrument of knowledge, I was already a Thomist without knowing it. When, several months later, I was to meet the Summa Theologica, I would erect no obstacle to its luminous flood."

Here is a beautifully written story of the spiritual development of two souls, a history of the passing of the old order, and some signs of the hope that "when nameless sufferings have purified us, then only can the breath of life, which is able to renew the face of the earth, blow once again upon our misfortunes and our plagues."—T. F. S.

FIVE and TEN Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From June 2, 1932, Edition

His Excellency, Bishop O'Hern, presided and the Rev. William J. Brien officiated at a Memorial Mass in St. Patrick's Church, Elmira, as members of Knights of Columbus assembled in state convention. Rochester was selected for the 1933 State Convention.

From June 3, 1937, Edition

News of the appointments of the Most Rev. Edward Mooney, Bishop of Rochester, as first Archbishop of Detroit and of the Most Rev. Walter A. Foery as fifth Bishop of Syracuse was received from Vatican City. Consecration by Archbishop Mooney of Bishop Foery was set in Syracuse for Aug. 15, 1937.

BUILD FOR TOMORROW



Contributed by Orson Lewis, New Britain, N. H.

EDITORIALS

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JUNE FOR THE SACRED HEART

Conscious nearness to Jesus should be the result of our devotion to Him under the title of the Sacred Heart. We come near to Him through love, and His burning love for us is symbolized in His Sacred Heart. This June of 1942 should find every Catholic turning with special devotion to the Sacred Heart. There are many things we need at any time in our lives; but our needs today are multiplied because of the danger war brings to us and to our dear ones and to our country.

The enemies of religion are enemies of our country. Among the liberties assailed in dictator countries is religious liberty. Persecution that began in the homeland has been extended into conquered countries. The Vatican is even now greatly disturbed by the threat of religious repression in occupied nations. The persecution concerns church property and its use for religious education and services; it concerns the clergy and their freedom to perform their duties; it concerns men and women and children and their freedom to hear Mass and go to the Sacraments and hear the word of God.

This June is a time to call on the Sacred Heart to protect the Church of God from exploitation, to give strength to those under religious persecution, to protect our country against the enemies of freedom. Thank God, we still have our churches and schools; we still have our freedom to worship God in accordance with our conscience! We can pray and hear Mass for ourselves, for those in authority, for our dear ones especially those in the armed forces of our country. We can make it a practice to receive Holy Communion frequently. There is no law to hinder us, no official to stop us; rather, our own elected officials in a free country encourage us to make the best use of our religious liberty. In praying for God's blessings on our country, we are praying for the good of religion, for the interests of the Sacred Heart. Grant that He may soon bring us the victory that shall guarantee to the world freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of religious practice!

HE INVITED MANY

The Sunday within the Octave of Corpus Christi brings us the Gospel parable of the man who prepared a Great Supper and invited many. It is a true picture of Our Lord and His institution of the Holy Eucharist. He, indeed, made a great Supper and invited many. He made His supper for all men; He invited first of all those who were near to Him as people of His own country. They were invited, they made excuses. They did not come. In every age since and in every country men have been invited; have made excuses; have not come.

But those who answered the invitation have been honored guests at the Lord's table. They have been fed with the Body of Christ, Corpus Christi. The poor and the feeble and the blind and the lame, they have come from the streets and the lanes of the city; the world has had little time for them, has made them no invitation to enter into their homes. But Christ has called them to attend His Supper.

Compel them to come in! With what insistence does Jesus urge us to partake of His Supper! He takes our neglect, our hesitation, our hesitation, in a kindly spirit; but by His grace, by the ministry of a good mother or friend, He compels us to enter. How often have we received Holy Communion in spite of the lack of strictness, on our part, of our willingness to let any excuse keep us away.

Corpus Christi — the Body of Christ! The Body of Christ that was broken for us, with the Blood of Christ that was shed for us. The Soul and Divinity of Our Blessed Saviour in the Sacrament of His Love. Invited to the Supper of the Lord, let us gladly accept His invitation and help to keep His home filled with guests!