

The Cross over Selma:

a Radio Talk by Bishop Hogan
On His Recent Trip to Alabama

My dear People:

I would like to share with you some reflections on my trip this past week to visit our own Sisters of St. Joseph who have represented the Church of the Diocese of Rochester so faithfully for 30 years in Selma, Ala.

Father Joseph Reinhart, the diocesan director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, accompanied me. Our first stop brought us to Mobile, Ala., and a meeting of the priest directors of the mission activities of the diocese of the eastern part of our country.

At this meeting Father Vincent Nugent from the Vincennes Order — who is known as a missiologist — an expert in the science of the theology of the missions, gave an inspiring address to the directors. He confirmed me in my abiding conviction of the importance of our concern for the missionary life of the Church.

Since I had gone to Selma to give evidence of this and support for what I believe is a sure sign of our vitality as the Church of Rochester, let me share Father Nugent's thoughts with you.

To those who might be tempted to say that we have enough to do in the Diocese of Rochester without thinking of Selma or Latin America or others in need, I propose this theology of our mission as found in Scripture and the documents of the Church; Let us never forget that:

The Church is meant to be an efficacious sign of the presence of Christ in the world. Her function is to make Christ visible to our world and to our time. The Church on earth is a pilgrim Church following the path of Christ on His pilgrimage to the Father.

She must, then, always be clothed with the garments of Christ: the garment of service, must replace robes of dignity and the garment of function must replace the robes of power — because Her divine founder only reached His glory after the Cross, death and burial in the tomb.

All Christians are by their vocation commissioned to be missionaries — living signs of Christ in the world — consecrated by Baptism and Confirmation — to be decentered — to be gradually purified of the 'ego' of selfishness — until they can express honestly the words of St. Paul — "I live — no, not I — but Christ lives in me".

Since Christ came into this world as truly human — embracing all humanity — the Church which continues His life among us is essentially catholic, i.e. she must embrace all men and exclude no one. She can accept no frontiers, either geographical or social, as a check on her expansion.

She cannot stop short even at the frontiers of the visible world for, in accordance with a terminology long traditional, she is distinguished into three groups in ceaseless intercommunication — The Church Militant in this world, the Church Suffering in Purgatory and the Church Triumphant in Heaven.

It is so vitally important for all of us to become aware of this essential dimension of the catholicity of the Church, for the more lively is our sense of it, the greater will be our sense of responsibility, and we will become increasingly aware, as the II Vatican Council teaches us, that we are all on a mission to the world because we are Catholic.

Mission is at the very heart of the Church and, therefore, it is the vocation of all, not the choice or election of a few. It is not the professional missionary alone who is missionary — it is the Church.

As bishop of the Diocese of Rochester I want to do everything I can to keep this vision of the Church before my peo-

ple. I was blessed as a pastor in the diocese for a short time in having a parish whose people possessed this vision of the universal Church — its catholicity.

There is a physical defect of sight called myopia — limiting clear vision to objects close at hand. There is also a more devastating spiritual defect which limits our range of vision to the narrow world of self (egotism) or to parish needs (parochialism).

I shall never hesitate to offer to all of you this challenge — how large is your world — and how big is your God?

Father Nugent's inspiring talk on the catholicity of the Church was a great preface for the story that was to unfold before us the next few days of our trip — the reality of Selma, Ala. — and the mission of the Church of Rochester to the desperate needs of the people of central Alabama.

Selma is a name that is now probably known around the world because of the charismatic leadership of one man. When the late Dr. Martin Luther King decided to challenge the conscience of America in a forceful way, to dramatize the inequities in our society, he chose Selma to be the starting point for a march of liberation for those enslaved in the chains of poverty that shackle the 'black belt' of this state.

The march to Montgomery began from this old city of some 30,000 people with its 60 churches founded in the name

of Christ — all surmounted by His Cross — all bearing the image of His arms outstretched to embrace all mankind without exception.

What an anomaly to have to report that, as of this past week, the vast majority of these people have not yet learned Christ's message of the oneness of the human family — and that worship of God is still completely isolated from the implications of the Christian vocation. Even white Catholics are not exempt from this indictment.

Most recently they have resisted their bishop's efforts to integrate their schools and have resented the efforts of missionaries to help the disadvantaged black population.

But, thank God, there are people who care — who stand in the midst of man's inhumanity to his fellowman — as a living sign of Christ's presence in the world and His loving care for all without exception. It was to support these generous missionaries and to confirm them in assurance of the validity of their mission that I visited Selma, the Edmundite Fathers and our Sisters of St. Joseph.

The Edmundite Fathers, or as they are known by the proper name, the Society of St. Edmund, came to Alabama in 1937. The society was founded in France in 1843 and came to America in 1901. They founded St. Michael's College in Winoski Park, Vt. Anxious to start other missions here in

America they readily accepted Archbishop Toolen's invitation to open Catholic missions in the South.

St. Elizabeth's in Selma was their first mission and it had 2 Catholic people when it began. From the humble beginnings their work has expanded to include some 14 missions in the South — in Alabama and South Carolina — and thousands of converts to the faith, untold assistance to the sick and social blessings to the poor.

In 1940 five Sisters of St. Joseph went from Rochester to Selma to help the Edmundite mission. They began with the teaching of elementary school — now known as St. Elizabeth's School.

In 1943 they began the apostolate of nursing and are responsible for the administration and care of what is now a most modern fully equipped and accredited Good Samaritan Hospital, with a health clinic and home for the aged.

We have nine Sisters in Selma at present — three attached to the hospital and working to the point of exhaustion because of the critical shortage of nursing staff — four teaching in the elementary school — and one doing home visitations working out of the Office of Economic Opportunity, and one assisting in the mission publications of the Edmundite Fathers and helping in a cooperative — a small business venture giving employment to many women who make patterned quilts and pillows.

It may be symbolic that our Sisters wear gray habits for they represent a third class in the segregated world of Selma. There are the whites and there are blacks and there are those who care — the Sisters and priests and those who support their efforts to assist the disadvantaged.

Our Sisters' love for their people is obvious and the poor see in them a sign of hope — a sense of their own worth as a person.

I will be asking you this May to give your financial support to all the missions served by the priests and religious of our diocese — in South America in our rural apostolate and in Selma. I beg now and always for the spiritual support of your prayers and personal sacrifices.

With the critical personnel shortage that we face at home, it would be easy for a bishop to succumb to the temptation to recall all of them to take care of our needs at home. But this I shall never do. I am convinced that our generous witness to the needs of the whole Church will bring abundant blessings to our work close by.

I shall be ever mindful of the exhortation to generosity of God's prophet: "Enlarge the space for your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly."

Joseph L. Hogan
Bishop of Rochester

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