



The Holy See

***RADIO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS PIUS XII
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE NATIONAL CATECHETICAL CONGRESS
OF THE UNITED STATES IN BOSTON****

Pontifical Palace in Castel Gandolfo

Saturday, 26 October 1946

Venerable brethren of the Episcopate, beloved sons of the clergy secular and regular, Our most dear children of the laity, members all of the Body of Christ (*1 Cor. 12, 27*), what wonder that you have responded with such loyal and holy enthusiasm to the invitation of Boston's zealous and large-hearted Archbishop, and from the wide-spread sections of the three Americas have flocked to this National Congress! That Body of which you are members has been threatened. That Body of Christ which is His Church (*Eph. 1, 23*), is menaced not only by hostile powers from without, but also by the interior forces of weakness and decline. You have been alerted to the danger. The growing weakness, the devitalizing process that has been going on — We speak with sorrow in Our heart — going on in not a few parts of the Church is due chiefly to an ignorance or at best a very superficial knowledge of the religious truths taught by the loving Redeemer of all.

Oh, We are fully aware of the magnificent results being achieved in the Catholic missions among the infidels throughout the world: three million and more receiving instruction in the Faith, almost half a million entering the Church each year. Nor does the instruction of the new converts cease at their baptism; with the glowing fervour of those who have found an unsuspected treasure they are eager to increase and deepen their knowledge of eternal Truth; and the missionaries, priests, brothers and sisters assisted by their devoted lay catechists do not fail them. But your Congress has been interested rather in those who live in countries where the true Faith has flourished for generations, in those also who were born of Catholic parents and duly baptized; and these We have in mind when We say that the vigour of the Church and its growth are menaced by their failure really to grasp the Truth they profess.

On the eve of His passion, having finished the Last Supper, only a brief hour or two before He entered into the crushing agony of Gethsemane, surrounded by His Apostles, who for all their

weakness of the moment clung to Him with the deepest affection of their hearts, Jesus raising His eyes to heaven spoke : « Father, the hour has come! Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify Thee... in order that to all whom Thou hast given Him He may give everlasting life. This is everlasting life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and him whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ » (*Jo.* 17, 1-3).

To know the only true God, to know that He is, to know who He is: that is the first and indispensable step towards life ever-lasting. Now God is not an empty word applied to some phantom conjured up out of the black caves of paganism. God is not some abstract idea decked out by scholars in alluring language to catch the adulation of vain and self-centered men and women; nor is he to be identified with the more palpable institution called the State, which at times would presume to vaunt itself the source and end of all man's rights and duties and liberties. Before the beginning of all these things the only true God, your God, was existing. He transcends all that is; and all that is, derives its being from Him. « Before the mountains were made or the earth and the world was formed, from eternity to eternity Thou art God » (*Ps.* 89, 2). « In the beginning, O Lord, Thou didst found the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou remainest; all of them shall grow old like a garment, but Thou art always the self-same and Thy years shall not fail » (*Ps.* 101, 26-28). Millions may hurry along the streets of great cities absorbed in their business or pleasure or sorrows with never a thought of God; yet the only true God is no less real; it is He who sustains them in their existence. Men gather to enact the laws of a people, or with the praise-worthy purpose of lifting their fellow-men out of the morass of misery and despair sown by injustice, the while they deliberately exclude recognition of the supreme law-giver and universal sovereign; yet the only true God is no less real for all that. And if He has given to His creature, man, the spiritual capacity to deliberate and willfully to act, He will most certainly demand of him a strict accounting of his thoughts and conduct. St. Paul made that clear when he wrote to the Romans : « We shall all stand at the judgment-seat of God . . . everyone of us will render an account for himself to God » (*Rom.* 14, 11-12).

Is not this denial or neglect of God, Creator and Supreme Judge of man, the fountainhead of the rising flood of evil that appalls the serious-minded today, and strews the path of human life with so many broken homes? If men believing in God, to echo St. Paul again, if men believing in God do not glorify Him as God and give thanks; if their faith is kept in a hidden closet of their private chamber, while immodesty, malice, avarice and all manner of wickedness are given full use of the drawing-room and public resorts, is it surprising that God should give them up in the lustful desires of their heart to uncleanness, so that women have changed the natural use for that which is against nature, men become full of envy and murder, contention, hateful to God, irreverent, proud, haughty, disobedient to parents, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy? (*Rom.* 1, 18-32). Men must be brought to be conscious of the fact of God's existence, of their utter dependence on His power and love and mercy, and of their moral obligation to shape their daily lives according to His most holy will.

And is that will so difficult to learn? Has not God made it clear to those who seek to know? In the first of the two letters which he sent to this congregation at Corinth St. Paul reminds them that when he first came among them he professed to know only one subject. It was Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Now St. Paul was a learned and cultured man, well read in the law, a university man he would be called today; yet as pastor of souls he had only one absorbing interest, one consuming desire, to bring his people to Jesus Christ, crucified. For this, he knew it, is eternal life to know the only true God and Him whom He sent, Jesus Christ.

To know Jesus crucified is to know God's infinite love for man. « By this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because He hath sent his only begotten Son into this world, that we may live by Him » (1 Jo. 4, 9). «And we have seen », again it is the disciple whom Jesus loved speaking, « and to testify that the Father hath sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 Jo. 4, 14). « If God has so loved us, we also ought to love one another » (*ibid.* II).

To know Jesus crucified is to know God's horror of sin; its guilt could be washed away only in the precious blood of God's only begotten Son become man.

Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today is that men have begun to lose the sense of sin. Smother that, deaden it — it can hardly be wholly cut out from the heart of man — let it not be awakened by any glimpse of the God-man dying on Golgotha's cross to pay the penalty of sin, and what is there to hold back the hordes of God's enemy from over-running the selfishness, the pride, the sensuality and unlawful ambitions of sinful man? Will mere human legislation suffice? Or compacts and treaties? In the Sermon on the Mount the divine Redeemer has illumined the path that leads to the Father's will and eternal life; but from Golgotha's gibbet flows the full and steady stream of graces, of strength and courage, that alone enable man to walk that path with firm and unerring step.

Those graces are channelled to your souls through the Church. Christ's work was not wholly accomplished at his death. In one sense it was only beginning. He has finished, finished perfectly the work assigned him by the Father to do in his mortal body. But He would live on to ensure that his beloved creatures should profit by the redemption He had wrought. And so He told his disciples that He was going to build a church; its foundation, the basis of its strength and unity, would be one of them, Peter. Impregnable against the powers of evil, imperturbable amid the crash of mere human institutions, deriving always its comprehensiveness and its oneness from him who in an unbroken, continuous line would be the successor of the first Christ-Vicar, it was to carry on until time and space are no more, until the book of human history is closed. He gave it the divine mandate to go forth and to teach all men of all nations. It would be the pillar and mainstay of the truth. It would be the holy mother imparting to her children a life of faith and sanctity which is the pledge of everlasting life. It would be his beloved spouse, for whom he delivered himself up, that He might sanctify her... that she might be holy and without blemish (*Eph.* 5, 26 ff.).

That is the soul-stirring challenge sent from the Heart of Christ to the National Congress, as it brings to a close the crowded days of spiritual and apostolic activity: that the Church might be holy and without blemish. It cannot be such, unless its members understand the fullness of the beauty of their Faith and of their obligations as members of Christ's Body. For surely to be obliged to be holy and without blemish in the sight of God is a beautiful thing, is it not? It is to reflect, however imperfectly, the sheer white holiness of God.

Instruction then is necessary, it is indispensable, not only for children in Sunday-schools and growing youth in higher classes. Religious instruction should hold a place of honour in college and university curricula. Millions, you well know, never enter college or university; and yet from their number will come leaders in important spheres of your national life. Are they to approach their tasks with the most meagre, shallow knowledge of their God, of their loving Redeemer and their Mother the Church? What a vast harvest is opened up to your zealous labours! And how deep is the consolation that fills Our paternal heart when We hear of the constantly increasing strides you are making, under the stimulating guidance and example of your Bishops, towards reaping that harvest! Priests will not suffice for the work; the sisters, to whom the Church in America owes such an incalculable debt, will not suffice. The laity must lend their valiant cooperation; and first of all Catholic parents should deem it their sacred duty to equip themselves so that they may be able to explain at least the simpler catechisms to their inquiring children.

This year and this month the Church is commemorating the third century that has passed since that giant of a hero, Isaac Jogues, and his lay companion, John Lalande, won the glory of martyrdom near Auriesville in what is now the State of New York. You are familiar with their story of zeal, suffering, sacrifice. They were catechists, come to teach the truths of God's revelation in the new world. You are successors to their apostolate. They have joined the white-robed army of martyrs before the throne of the Lamb; but their affection for the land of their adoption and their glory is all the stronger. With confidence, then, We appeal to their powerful intercession in behalf of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, while as a token of Our keen, paternal interest We impart to all its members and especially to all who have taken part in the Eighth National Congress in Boston the Apostolic Benediction.

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