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A Meditation

by **KILIAN McDONNELL, O.S.B.**

THERE is a danger that the Christian living in a pagan society will accept its standards without recognizing that they are pagan. This would be the tragedy of blindness. There is a second danger. It is the danger that the Christian will see both society and its standards for what they are and yet be content to leave them as they are. This would be the crime of infidelity. It would be the sin of rocking-chair complacency.

The terrifying thing about Christians is not their sinfulness but rather their complacency. They see the darkness over the world and they curse it, but they will not bring it the light that is theirs. They see the enemy, know his strength and weakness. They have weapons, but they will not give battle. They have not asked themselves Leon Bloy's question, "Why should I receive weapons if not to fight with them, and why light if not to spread it?"

But some will say, "You accuse us of complacency. We boast of prudence. Is not flight the safest and most prudent course when there is danger of contagion? Can you come to grips with the sin of the world without the certainty of becoming involved in that sin? Can you walk into that darkness without stumbling, fight in that battle without being wounded?"

The answer to such objections is quite simple. Prudence is certainly a virtue, and a virtue of great nobility. But is it the only virtue? What about the virtues of charity, fortitude, and that strangely neglected virtue, magnanimity, which disposes us to do great things for God?

There is a surprisingly great number of spiritual persons who are quite convinced that God is the only object of piety. They seem to have forgotten that the world, too, has claims upon their love. Their difficulty lies in the mystery of the cross. They know that Our Lord was crucified by the world. They know that Our Lord was detached from the things of the world, that He died to the world. But what they have forgotten is that Our Lord also died for the world. Our Lord has

shown us how to love God. He has no less shown us how to love the world.

Chesterton has said, "There is only one really startling thing to be done with the ideal, and that is to do it." What we need is not the poetry of spinning a new ideal, but the rather prosaic job of living up to the old ideal. What we lack is not some secret doctrine that will enable us to subdue the world. No, what we lack is much more commonplace and dull than that. We have not learned the old lesson, the obvious lesson: that Christ has loved the world and died for the world, that we cannot waste the Blood of Christ. We must do the startling thing by doing the obvious thing—we must fulfill the Christian ideal of loving the world and of bringing the world to Christ.

It is admittedly difficult to conquer the world for Christ. The difficulty is, however, mainly in the mind. By this is not meant that the obstacles are all imaginary or unreal. It means only that the obstacles are in the narrowness of our thinking and praying. We cannot win our city to Christ if the front door is as far as we can see. We cannot triumph over the world if our interest does not extend beyond the table-talk of the Happy Hour Bridge Club. Small ideas and smallness of soul are the greatest and the first of the obstacles to be overcome.

Smallness should make the Christian unbearably uncomfortable, because the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, a monumental thing defying the ordinary limitations of space and time. We are members of this Body of Christ. All those who do not actually belong to the Mystical Body are still persons for whom Christ died. They are therefore potential members of Christ.

Whether it disturbs us or not, we are, as members of Christ, dependent one upon another. "You are Christ's body, organs depending upon each other. . . . The eye cannot say to the head 'I have no need of you,' or the head to the feet 'I have no need of you'. . . . There is to be no want of

unity in the body. All the different parts of it are to make each other's welfare their common care." To neglect this "common care," to be unconcerned about the welfare of the members of Christ, actual and potential, is the subtlest kind of suicide. Subtle suicide and slow death because it is the notorious abuse of the homeliest of virtues, minding one's own business. Nothing is so much our business as the life of the Body of which we are members.

We must extend our vision and broaden our interest to embrace the whole Body of Christ and the whole world. This must be done in two dimensions, in prayer and in action. At the moment we are interested only in the dimension of prayer, remembering that our action will be motivated by the kind of prayer we pray.

IF we open our Missal and look at the prayers of Good Friday services, we will see how extensive is the scope of the Church's prayer life. We will see there prayers for the universal Church; for the Pope and bishops; "for all the holy people of God"; for prospective converts; for Protestants, Jews, and pagans; for the sick, hungry, imprisoned; and for travelers. Or if we take the beautiful Marian Year prayer composed by our Holy Father, we will see how he rejoices with the joy of the world and suffers with the pain of the world. "Bend tenderly over our aching wounds. Convert the wicked, dry the tears of the afflicted and oppressed, comfort the poor and humble, extinguish hatreds, sweeten harshness, safeguard the flower of purity in youth, protect the Holy Church, make all mankind feel the attraction of Christian goodness! . . . May all men recognize that they are brothers."

We who are committed to loving and conquering the world are faced with the huge fact that the scope of our prayers has been sufficiently narrow to pass through the eye of a needle. Is it any wonder that the closest we ever come to action is the rocking chair?