

J.M.J.

PEACE OF GOD

4th
Address Delivered by
Rev. Theodore M. Healy
at St. Louis University
Religious Emphasis Week
March 11, 1951

I would like to say from the outset, at the risk of shocking you, that I am not particularly in favor of Religious Emphasis week. I say this despite the fact that it gives me the opportunity of coming to your great university for a second time within a few months, and also despite the fact that it is a great honor to be called upon to address you, and a real pleasure to be with you here today.

Maybe some of you also mildly disapprove of Religious Emphasis Week, although I suspect that in your case it might be for different reasons, such as being constrained to listen to me while other more pleasant occupations are in prospect—especially during springtime in the southland.

I trust you will bear with me if I tell you why I am not totally in favor of the very activity which is responsible for my being here—pleasant though that is. You see, I am afraid that Religious Emphasis Week might put religion in the same category as the Red Cross, or the Girl Scouts, or Mardi Gras. All of these are things that are legitimately emphasized on occasion, but religion is so fundamental, so universal, and so daily in its demands that to set aside a week to emphasize religion is like setting aside a week to emphasize breathing. If religion is

meaningful at all, it must be meaningful all day long as well as all year long and every week of the year.

The Italians have a proverb— Chi troppo vuole, niente ha— who wishes too much gets nothing. In wishing for more, we should be happy for what is. Perhaps in the present state of affairs, when so many people have scarcely a moment for the things of God, I should be grateful for the chance of speaking to you students today on so fundamental a subject as the Peace of God. Indeed I am. And now to begin with a word of thanks to those who have made it possible for us to be here and with a sincere hope that we may not just take up your time but leave with you something worth thinking about, and acting on after I have left this pleasant scene for the distant reaches of Yankeeeland up north. There the green clad lads are already dreaming of a queer oblong object made of pigskin. After building lots of character and public relations last year, I fear that their thoughts are of conflict rather than peace. But anyway, let's leave the good word down here and worry about them when we return.

LIFE magazine is presently running a series of editorials entitled, "This Way to Peace." They begin by saying that no one should be tricked by the title into believing that the editors of

LIFE know or can present any sure way to peace. They are speaking about international peace, of course, and on the grounds of political action I am inclined at the moment to agree with them that there is no sure way to peace. You will probably agree with me too when I say that people all over the world today yearn for peace, and yet, feel deeply frustrated at their inability to do anything about achieving it on a world wide scale.

Here is another approach though. There is a sure way to peace—on a smaller individual scale—that can be achieved by any person willing to try. And did you ever stop to think that the tensions and conflicts throughout the world today are little more than a vast mirroring of the tensions and conflicts that tear the souls of individual human beings like ourselves. Maybe this is where we should begin, certainly the only place we can begin with any kind of realistic approach to peace is right within our own lives. If people generally are at peace, certainly the world would be at peace. And we are people. Why not try to establish the formula for peace in our own lives first.

What makes for peace in a person's life? Or what is peace? Trying to define it is like trying to define other commonplace things such as time and space. We all know what they are, but try to define them and words fail. However, we can borrow a thought here, from one

o

of the greatest thinkers of all times. Thomas Aquinas left us a good definition of peace in three words—he called it the "tranquility of order." You might say that peace is the quiet enjoyment of the fact that the main elements of our life are as they ought to be. If you are not at peace, you will be the first and best judge of how close to reality this description of peace comes. If peace is what we say it is, and if you are not inwardly at peace, we may assume that there is some basic disorder in your life. We might also assume that you are responsible for it, because you, not someone else, you are uneasy at the disorder—and the thought is even lurking within you, that you had better do something about it, because nothing is worse than this utter discordant lack of peace in our lives. It takes the blue out of the sky, the sunshine out of the day, and the music out of the song of birds. On the other hand, when you are inwardly at peace, the sky is bluer, the sunshine brighter, and music is everywhere.

So far, we have tried to establish these few things. First, that peace is wonderful, most akin to happiness, that life is unlivable without it— Secondly, that we have something to do about establishing peace or losing peace in our lives, that peace is something to be achieved, not just a gift handed down to us but more like

a beachhead won and held. Also, it can be had today and lost tomorrow, lost today and regained. Thirdly, that peace is somehow intimately connected with order, as the loss of peace, or conflict, is an indication of disorder in our lives, disorder we have introduced ourselves, disorder we must either shake off or miserably live with.

There are several paths we can take from here. One obvious route would be to search out the ordinary kinds of disorder, the normal roots of conflict in our lives, the destroyers of peace. On the more positive side, we could talk about the work of keeping order in our lives and thus continually working for peace. And then there is a third alternative, which would be for me to remind myself first of all, and then to remind you, that I am supposed to be talking about the Peace of God; and that this still is, despite—any views of mine to the contrary—religious emphasis week. What then does religion, or God have to do with this peace of soul we are discussing? Or, to link all the alternatives together, is there any connection between God and the order that makes for peace or the disorder that causes the lack of peace in our lives?

First of all, to dismiss religion somewhat abruptly so that we

can get to God who is the heart of religion, this is what one of the world's greatest psychiatrists, Dr. C. G. Jung, had to say about religion and 'peace of soul'.

"During the past thirty years, people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among all my patients over thirty-five, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook in life. It is safe to say that everyone of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook." (C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 264)

Most of you are still on the sunny side of thirty-five, and you can avoid being a candidate for the psychiatrists' couch later on in life if you work now for the formulation of this religious outlook to which Dr. Jung refers. All of this brings us back to the basic concepts of God, and order, and disorder, and peace and conflict.

Did God ever have anything to say about peace? Most of you must recall the divinely inspired song of the angel the night Christ

Our Lord was born — "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." Here is a formula for peace that will really work if you full understand it.

Grant me a few basic assumptions which would take us too far afield to prove, and I think that we can work out together a sure formula for peace in our lives.

Grant that God created everything to glorify the beauty, the goodness, the truth that God is and always has been and always will be. Grant that God established a basic order in the world, since many have argued from the reality of this striking order to the fact of God's existence. Grant that there is glory given to God in the highest by the order and beauty of the created universe— the majesty of our snow capped mountain ranges, the wide expanse of the ocean, the breathless diamond-studded sweep of the stars overhead at night.

But then realize that while the whole created universe, except man, necessarily gives glory to God in the highest just by the fact that it is and by the fact that it does in a million different ways reflect something of what God is, yet man alone on earth gives the highest glory to God. Man alone can consciously be what God meant him to be, man alone of all earthly creatures can freely achieve the

order intended by God in the world, and in his own life.

This is why Pascal remarked in his Pensées that God is more glorified by a little child saying his prayers beside his bed at night, than by the whole expanse of the created universe. The whole ordered universe has to be what it is, but the child could jump into bed without recognizing the fact that God is a Father who made us and cares for us, whose help we need and pray for.

But here is the other side of the picture. While man alone of earthly creatures can consciously use the whole world and everything in it to glorify God, by using all things according to God's plan for order, man alone introduces disorder into the world. Man alone can abuse creatures. Man alone can establish a conflict instead of peace within himself, conflict with his fellow men, conflict with God. The greatness and tragedy of man is this, that he alone can consciously earn and enjoy the peace of God, and on the other hand, man alone can consciously reject God and His peace that results from keeping all things in order.

Now you can begin to see what great meaning lurks behind the simple song of the angels — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth,

peace to men of good will. These are correlatives—If man has good will he glorifies God by being what God intended him to be, he establishes and maintains the law of God, the order of God in his life, and this man of good will cannot be in conflict, he must enjoy the tranquillity of order, because he is at peace, with God, with himself, with his purpose in life, with his fellow men. Thus the glory of God and peace of soul are gained together by the man of good will, or lost together by the man of bad will. If a man could disregard God and His law and still be inwardly happy and at peace—then there would be no God, for His law would be futile and if so, He would not be omnipotent.

Of this, however, I have no worry. I have talked to hundreds of people whose problems are bothering them. If they are in conflict with the law of God, I always ask them first of all — "Are you happy in living this way?" Never yet has one said yes.

St. Augustine gives us a personal picture of this process in his Confessions. He proves himself to be a master of disorder, which means that he ran through the whole gamut of sins, trying to find something outside of God that would give purpose and meaning to his life. After spending some thirty years seeking his own selfish interest, his own prestige, his own pleasure, and all of this apart from God and

His basic plan for order, Augustine finally cried out from the depths of a thousand conflicts, the cry that finally led him to peace—"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and the heart of man is restless until he rests in Thee."

Does this mean that we must lose everything else to possess His peace? Of course not. But it does mean that in all the strivings of life we must preserve the order of values that God placed in our very natures: That the soul and its aspirations are entitled to more attention than the body and its drives, that virtue spells happy living as well as good living, that vice has sour fruits that mature surely, even though sometimes slowly, that God's order is for our happiness and peace as well as His glory.

All things that God created are good, but all must be used by man in God's plan, if they are to glorify God. All things must be used by man in such a way that both he and they glorify God. As St. Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever else you do, do all for the glory of God." Speech is good but bad if used for cursing, lying, reviling, blaspheming, or slandering. The pleasures of food and drink and even sex are good if used within the order for which

they were established by God. But this too calls for good will if they are to lead to peace instead of conflict in our lives. Drunkenness, or fornication, or immorality of any kind in thought, or word, or speech are all signs of bad will and must lead to disorder, conflict, and a lack of peace in our lives.

Self preservation is a good instinct but it cannot glorify God if perverted into egotism, selfishness, avarice, or greed or the exploitation of other people.

So you see that our basic formula for peace has a wide application. If we have good will we line up our puny will with the all powerful will of God, we join our puny minds to the wisdom of His plan for human happiness, His law for order in the world of men. Then all things can be used to glorify Him—as the stones in our churches, the voices in our choirs, the loves in our lives glorify Him—and in glorifying God we achieve order in our lives, and enjoy the tranquillity of order which is His peace.

Everything which is against His law is a weapon of disorder, a step towards conflict, a move away from God and His peace. Note that He will not force His peace upon us—but if we choose something else

in place of Him we not only lose Him, but what we have chosen. And if enough people choose badly the disorder becomes syndicated into what we call war.

Watch the inner logic of what happens. If enough people choose pleasures that are against His law, war subjects them to its racking physical and moral pains. If enough choose money or mammon instead of God and His justice, then the riches of the world are dissipated in war's bombs or invested in the dead capital of war's armaments. If enough choose themselves and their own selfish wills instead of God's will, then liberty is universally lost in war's regimentation where people are sent where they would least wish to go, and regulated down to the last ounce of meat and the last drop of gasoline. The logic is inexorable as both God and peace are lost, and that for which God was abandoned is also lost.

This basic lesson of life was sadly exemplified in the life of a great recent poet, Francis Thompson, and beautifully portrayed in his immortal work — The Hound of Heaven.

Thompson, or Tommy as his friends called him, was a student like you. He shared the joys of the present, the hopes for the future,

the happy remembrances of the past that fill your lives thus far. He had great talent and the normal zest for life. Somehow, he started off on the wrong foot, and once he began to travel downward he typified the famous dictum of Shakespeare "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." Like many other young people, he thought he could deceive God, his family, his friends, his own desires to be someone worth while. Somehow things would work out. He would find peace, a security, or happiness somewhere, with some person, at some turn of the downward path he traveled. And as he walked and ran away from God, and God's plan for his happiness, he really dreaded that God might somehow catch up with him—not knowing that God was with him all the time, that without God, he would enjoy nothing else, and that all he sought would turn to ashes in his mouth until he had the courage to face God and accept His way as the only true way to peace.

It was to Thompson's credit that he did eventually understand the drama of life and the key to peace although his road to peace led him to sickening depths, through all the back alleys and dives and dope shops of London's slums, until he lay sick and dying in a gutter from which he was rescued by a girl whom he calls "a child of Sin."

12

Here is a man who lived out the logic of disorder to the depths
and came back to peace again, leaving us an unforgettable poem that
speaks to the heart of every person living. I will only read you a
few lines from the beginning and ending of the Hound of Heaven.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue,
Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat—
"Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me."

That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:
"And is thy earth so marred,
Shattered in shard on shard?"

13

Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!
Strange, piteous, futile thing,
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
Seeing none but I makes much of naught" (He said),
"And human love needs human meriting:
How hast thou merited—
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?
Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy of any love thou art!
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come."
Halts by me that footgall:
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou drovest love from thee, who drovest Me."

There is something of the Hound of Heaven in all of our lives.
Perhaps if the flashy attractions of a very disorganized world lead
us into conflicts today, we can be grateful for the lurking presence
of God which ever dogs our steps, even though they lead away from
Him and His peace.

If nothing else will spur us on to seek for peace in our lives
and in our times, at least we can be motivated by the total frustration
of a world on the brink of World War III.

There is very little we can do about international peace short of prayer, but we can do everything, with God's help, about our own peace of soul. If enough people take the angels' song to heart "glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will"—peace can really come back to earth. But it must come first of all to the hearts of the men and women who people the earth, living with good will.

Because good will comes so hard to all of us we need to repeat often those words of the Lord's Prayer—"Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." It is God's will that makes for our peace and happiness as well as His own greatest glory.

Some may say — How can I know the will of God, the law for His order— and that is a simple matter for it is written in your hearts.

Some may say God seems far off but in listening to his voice in your conscience you are listening to Him, in following your conscience you are following Him and working for peace.

Some may simply say "I don't want to do the will of God. It's too hard." To them I say — it's harder to live with your conflicts, never to know the peace of God, the testimony of a good conscience. And we must say too that those who pray most get the most help from God, without which we all fail often in trying to follow His will.

Lastly, I would say that try as you may — you cannot avoid the inner urge of your soul which craves for the peace of God, the only real security in a world of insecurity, the only security that passes from the trials of time into eternity. And what is a real blessing, you cannot avoid the voice of God that seems you down all the devious highways and byways of life. Meditate often on the beautiful words of Psalm 138. I give you a few of them as a parting thought—

Lord, I lie open to thy scrutiny; thou knowest me, knowest when I sit down and when I rise up again, canst read my thoughts from far away. Wake I or sleep I, thou canst tell; no movement of mine but thou art watching it. Before ever the words are framed on my lips, all my thought is known to thee; rearguard and vanguard, thou dost compass me about, thy hand still laid

upon me. Such wisdom as thine is far beyond my reach, no thought of mine can attain it.

Where can I go, then, to take refuge from thy spirit, to hide from thy view? If I should climb up to heave, thou art there; if I sink down to the world beneath, thou art present still. If I could wing my way eastwards, or find a dwelling beyond the western sea, still would I find thee beckoning to me, thy right hand upholding me. Or perhaps I would think to bury myself in darkness: night should surround me, friendlier than day; but no, darkness is no hiding place from thee, with thee the night shines clear as day itself; light and dark are one.

Thine are my inmost thoughts. Didst thou not form me in my mother's womb? I praise thee for my wondrous fashioning, for all the wonders of thy creation. Of my soul thou hast full knowledge, and this mortal frame has no mysteries for thee, who didst contrive it in secret, devise its pattern, there in the dark recesses of the earth. All my acts thy eyes have seen, all are set down already in thy record; my days were numbered before ever they came to be.

A riddle, O my God, thy dealings with me, so vast their

scope! As well count the sand, as try to fathom them; and,
were that skill mine, thy own being still confronts me.
Scrutinize me, O God, as thou wilt, and read my heart; put
me to the test, and examine my restless thoughts. See if on
any false paths my heart is set, and thyself lead me in the
ways of old.