

(Address of Welcome given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President of the University of Notre Dame, at the Opening Session of the National Congress for Religious, Notre Dame, Indiana, August 9, 1952.)

As a member of a religious community and a University already abundantly blessed, we consider it a singular blessing to be able to welcome here this evening the first National Congress for Religious in the United States. We think it altogether fitting that you should be made welcome at the University of Notre Dame, because the history of this locale has so wonderfully paralleled the growth of religious life here in the United States.

Two salient factors have ever accompanied the fruitful growth of religious life in this country since Christopher Columbus first viewed the new world from his flagship, the Santa Maria. Those two strong and vibrant currents have been devotion to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to Mary, the Mother of God.

Early in the history of our Republic, the American hierarchy dedicated our country to Mary Immaculate. Nowhere in the world was Pius X's exhortation to frequent Holy Communion more joyously received or more enthusiastically put into practice. Frequent and daily reception of Holy Communion has indeed become the hallmark of fervent American Catholics. Witness now the tens of thousands of consecrated religious women, bearing the name of Mary, and leading millions of young Americans in the practice of daily Eucharistic companionship with Our Lord. Witness the fecundity of the many religious orders of men who have so continually conducted their apostolic works under the egis of Mary in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord.

This fruitful direction of religious life to Jesus, through Mary, has ever characterized the growth of the University of Notre Dame. When the founder of the University, Father Edward Sorin, arrived here in November of 1842, his first act was to consecrate the spot to Our Lady, Notre Dame. The first guest in his poor log cabin was Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Nor was it the first time that this place had been hallowed in this fashion. Tradition has it that Père Marquette passed through here on his way to the Mississippi. Early missionaries had offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass here for the Potawatomi Indians, and had dedicated their mission station under the beautiful title of Notre Dame des Lacs. Strikingly enough, Father Stephen Badin, the first priest ordained in the United States, labored here, bought this land, and gave it to Father Sorin for the building of a school.

Today, the University of Notre Dame is known to the world as the place where Mary reigns, from a Golden Dome, over a city of the Blessed Sacrament, where twenty-nine chapels house Our Lord and thousands of young men present themselves to be His living tabernacles each day of the schoolyear.

And so, it is not really we who welcome you here. Everywhere you go on this campus, Our Blessed Lord will be in your midst to welcome you and to further the wonderful purpose that has brought you here. All that you do in these few days will be made fruitful under the motherly patronage of Mary who is Queen, by right, in this place. Surely, then, you will feel at home with them. And we are honored to welcome you in their names and to tell all of you that it is our privilege to be able to serve you on their behalf. May God and Our Lady bless all of you and your Congress.