

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President of the University of Notre Dame, at the Catholic Interracial Council Communion Breakfast, October 25, 1959, Chicago, Illinois.)

I would like to talk today about things that are close to my heart and relating to the general problems of Catholics and civil rights. I think it's a wonderful day to do this, because one of the most modern feast days we have in the whole liturgical calendar is the feast day of Christ the King. I think for each one of us, as persons and as individuals, the feast of Christ the King brings this simple message, or, perhaps, this simple question: To what extent does Christ reign in our own hearts and minds? To what extent do we have the heart of Christ? To what extent do we represent in this day and age the instrumentality of our Savior and Redeemer?

You know, it's an amazing thing that Christ being God could have accomplished redemption for all men of all times, as He did, in a very personal immediate way. Yet somehow He wanted to stretch it out across the ages and to use each of us, poor instruments though we may be, priests and laity, to be the instrumentality of bringing Him and His wonderful saving presence, His virtue, His whole life, mentality, and spirit to a world that is somewhat lost and disorganized without it.

For each of us this whole question of civil rights and our participation in the city of men is not just a social thing, or an emotional thing, or an exigency of the moment. It is first and foremost and fundamentally a theological problem, a moral problem, a spiritual problem. And it can only be settled, ultimately, in terms of what our basic beliefs are, as Christians and as Catholics.

I have often wondered at the dichotomy between the Catholic

faith which is pretty clear-cut on this, and Catholic practice which is somewhat muddled at times, if you have to judge it from the lives of individual Catholics, here or in any other country of the world.

I suppose this is why we have feasts like Christ the King so that somehow each Catholic may be confronted with this question of: To what extent does Christ reign in my life? To what extent do I have the mind of Christ? To what extent do I speak the thoughts of Christ and think those thoughts deeply and believe them? To what extent does my heart and its emotions represent the emotions of Christ, if you will, His compassion, His love, His justice, His generosity, His interest in every human being whoever lived or whoever will live?

You know, there was a first Communion Breakfast of all times and, strangely enough, it is called the Last Supper. But this first Communion Breakfast was an occasion for remarks much more profound than anything I will have to say this morning. And if I would take a general theme for my remarks, it would be from Our Lord's words at that Last Supper, where He said, "By this shall men know that you are my disciples: That you love one another as I have loved you."

If we want a measure for the extent of our love for other persons, for other human beings, we have the magnificent measure of God's love for us, of Christ, Our Lord's love for us. And to try to put some dimensions on that almost impossible love of God for man, His infinite wisdom and generosity. I like to think of a sermon I got once by a French Dominican called Lasaubret. In this sermon, he talks about what he calls the "divine communications". And he says, as he gave the sermons at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris during the Lenten season, "What has God really given to man?" He starts out in the natural order: God has given us a mind and a will, and in this we are indeed

Godlike, made to God's image and likeness, because of all creation we are the only members of creation that can think, the only members that can really choose and love. And in this, these two functions, we become persons, as God Himself is personal.

Then, not satisfied with this, he says, our God takes upon Himself human nature. He becomes a man with all the weakness of man. He was hungry as man was hungry. He needed sleep. He felt the need for companionship. He wept at the death of His friends. And He took all of our human frailty, even the power of suffering that a God-man could suffer in all its infinity and He offered this up for our salvation.

Still he was not satisfied with this, because this suffering was for some purpose, namely, our redemption. He accomplishes this redemption through our re-birth in Christ in Baptism, where He comes Himself to dwell in our souls and each of us who is baptized may surely say that we are temples of God, that we partake in the Divine Nature, that somehow, through Grace, God dwells in us.

Not satisfied with this great gift of His Ownself which makes us Christians, our re-birth in Christ, all along the way with our fumbings and our stumblings, He nourished us with His own Body and Blood, and it was this indeed, this act of nourishment, that brought you together primarily today for a Communion Breakfast. And He offers Himself, not only once at Calvary, but daily in every church in the world and on the altar of the Mass, to renew this Sacrifice and to apply it to our day and our age, and to give each of us the impression of Christ anew in our soul and His presence within us so that we can go forth and try to act in a Christlike fashion, to try to think like Christ, to try to feel, if you will, like Christ.

And not satisfied with all this, because all this is looking towards the consummation of the great gift of God to us, ultimately He gives us a vision and a complete possession of Himself in what is called, theologically, the Beatific Vision. But not just a vision of all that is good and beautiful and an understanding of all that is in this world and of our universe, but a full embracing love of all of this and a possession never-ending of all of this and, in this, to possess all the good things that we've sought through life, and to somehow gather together into this Beatific Vision the totality of our wildest hopes, if you will, and of our best strivings and to have this forever, and in this to be indeed supremely happy with God.

Well, now I ask you, if this is the measure of our love for our fellowmen - what God has done for us - and if this is what He has done for us, then try to think for a moment what we are asked to do to our fellowmen on this pattern. You all recall the time the scribe came up to Our Lord and he said, "What's the main commandment?" And Our Lord said, "Well, what do you think?" And he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and thy whole mind and thy neighbor as thyself." And Our Lord said, "You have spoken rightly." But then the man said, "But who is my neighbor?" And then came forth the wonderful story of the Good Samaritan.

Now we all know the story. But I think the interesting thing is that when Our Lord told that little parable, to illustrate who is our neighbor, He picked a man in trouble, a man who had been set upon, who lay wounded by the side of the road. And he spoke of the high and mighty who walked by, including a Pharisee and a priest. Now, the Samaritan who was indeed supposed to be an outcast, bound up the man's wounds and took him to

an inn, paid for his keep, and said: "If there is anymore, I will stop and pay the rest of the bill when I return."

But who is our neighbor today, in this day and age? Again I think, our neighbor, in the most poignant fashion and in the most telling fashion, is the person in difficulty. And this brings me to one more attempt to get somewhere near the mind of Christ on this whole matter of love and justice - the mind of Christ that we must exemplify if Christ is King in our hearts and in our minds. That is the wonderful example that Our Lord gives of the Last Judgment, of the judgment that all of us some day must face of how we have used the talents that God gave us and how we have spent our lives. The interesting thing is Our Lord knew the commandments full well and He knew the things that are on people's minds when they think of being moral or immoral, things like sex, stealing, and all of the other so-called horrible sins. And yet when it came to exemplifying what God was going to say on the Last Day, Our Lord didn't pull out what might be called these dramatic sins. He said on the Last Day He was going to say to one group of people, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, into the kingdom which is prepared for you from all eternity." And then to others He is going to say, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his followers." And then He said the people are going to ask, "Well, Lord, why? Why this judgment? Why do some go to heaven and some go to hell?"

Then He gave the illustration of the means by which He was going to judge. And it was so simple you might think that He was really not up on His Commandments and He had missed the big dramatic sins. Because what He said is: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat. And I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. And I was naked and you clothed me. And I was in prison

and you visited me." And He said then the people will say, "Well, Lord, when did we see You hungry and thirsty and naked and in prison and do these things for You?" And He said, "Whatsoever you did for one of these, my least brethren, you did it for Me." And here we come to the real notion of the Kingdom of God, that what we do for anyone, the least brethren, the man most in trouble, our neighbor, the one closest to us and in trouble, what we do for this person is the same as a perfect act of the love of God. We do it for God Himself and He is identified in this person.

My favorite story on this is a story in the life of St. John of God, who was the first founder of hospitals. I can't tell you I was there and saw this happen. It's like a lot of stories in the lives of the saints. You may be skeptical about it. I don't think that's important, because theologically the story makes a lot of sense.

The story goes that St. John of God had a fairly big house and he used to go out in the streets at night - this was in Spain - and pick up poor injured people lying along the gutters. I suppose he got his share of drunks and ne'er-do-wells and others that no one else cared about. And before the days of social services, many of these people, when they were in trouble or sick or dying, lay where they fell - as they do indeed today in many parts of Africa and Asia. He used to go out and he would help these people into his house and he would wash them, take care of them, and when they were well, would let them go. One night, as the story goes, he picked up a very repulsive fellow, probably evil-smelling, filthy, apparently sick and vomiting, all the other things you can think of. This was not the kind of fellow you would want to spend a half hour with. But St. John of God picked him up and carried him into his house, put him in bed, and started

to wash him off, and he needed a rather complete wash off. As he was washing the fellow's hands, he noticed a mark that looked like a nail had been driven in one hand. Then he went to the other hand and washed that and there was the same thing. Now a little bit shaken, he tried the two feet and there, too, was the mark of a nail. Then gingerly he pulled aside the fellow's tunic and went at his side and there was the mark of a spear that pierced the man's side. Then, as the story goes, the man disappeared.

And it came home to St. John of God, as I just quoted you from Our Lord's own words, "Whatsoever you do to one of these, my least brethren, you do it to Me."

Now, if you measure up to this dimension of charity, people will know we're Christians or Catholics. They will know that we really follow Christ by the way we love one another, by the way we love our neighbor as ourselves. Our love for God, our love for men, is patterned on God's own love for us and what He has done for us - what He has done for all mankind, spiritually. I think you'll agree with me that the things we're asked to do are pretty small and pretty puny compared to what God has done for us. And I think we, too, would be rather cheap if we couldn't do for others along the lines of what God does for us, so magnificently to give us Himself in so many different ways.

I've always found it incomprehensible, and I speak as a priest in this, that so many Catholics can be so wonderful in so many ways, so generous to good causes, so personable in their family life, so faithful to their wives, so loving to their children, so good in many ways, perhaps maternalistic might be a better word in some ways. But, despite this, they are so unconcerned and so wrong about matters of what might be called social morality.

There are so many Catholics I know, good and wonderful people, who in their personal lives and in their individual morality are about as close to 100 per cent as one could hope to be - perhaps much more than I am personally. And yet, in their social thought, they are about as anachronistic as a dinosaur. They are completely out of step with the mind of Christ and the mind of the Church, the word of the Encyclicals, the letters of the Bishops - the basic Catholic doctrine. And I think it's important that those of us who do want to concern ourselves - and apparently you are concerned or you wouldn't be here - do feel at least that there is some deep spiritual, moral reason for being here and for the things we do. That perhaps might help you in talking to your fellow-Catholics who may not do as much or may not be interested in doing as much.

When you look at the doctrine of the Church in its most fundamental principles, it is just impossible for a person who really believes this and thinks it to be unjust in an interracial way or in any other way, or to be uncharitable in an interracial or any other way.

You look, for example, on the basic doctrine of the unity of the human race - that we all come from two parents, Adam and Eve, that, if you go back far enough, all of us have the same human blood, we have the same human nature. You can go deeper than that and say that one Savior came and gave His life for all of us, literally all of us. When you stop to think that in our purpose in living as Christians, we are aiming at the same goal to be shared together and somehow we must help each other along the way. If you look at the very word "Catholic" which means universal and comprising all, excluding none, and if you take the total complexion of what this means, to have one God, one heaven, one Creator, one Redeemer, and one common human nature, then on top of that to say we cannot offer equal opportunity to all,

that we must discriminate between this type and that type, or this race or that race - the thing is simply so incomprehensible that one stops to wonder if somehow the message didn't get through or the message wasn't heard.

Maybe we priests are at fault that we don't preach this doctrine often enough. Or perhaps our laity is at fault in not plummeting deeply enough in the faith that is theirs and the reasons for that faith.

I recall being at a nice party on the North Shore, some years ago. A very personable, very attractive young lady came to me and said, "Father, I'm amazed. I just heard that you have Negroes at Notre Dame."

And I said, "What amazes you about it?"

"Well," she said, "it just doesn't seem right."

And I said, "Why doesn't it seem right?"

She said, "Well, Notre Dame is too good for Negroes."

I said, "That's an interesting point of view." I added, "Just let your mind run for a moment. What is the best place there is?"

She said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Well, just let your imagination go. Where is the place that everyone would most want to be, if it could be arranged, and if we can make it?"

She said, "Well, I suppose you're talking about heaven."

I said, "That's right. Do you think there are any Negroes in heaven?"

She said, "I never thought of it."

"Well," I said, "think of it for a moment."

"Well," she said, "Yes, I guess there must be Negroes in heaven."

I said, "I suppose you want to go there?"

She said, "yes."

And I said, "Well, maybe you'd better get started thinking a little bit about living with Negroes on earth, so you will be ready for heaven."

Well, the point behind all of this is that we must be terribly concerned about the deep problems that beset the City of Man in our day and age. As Catholics we can't possibly extricate ourselves from these problems, except at the cost of being less Catholic than we should be. Somehow we must through conversation, through persuasion, through what we do in our own lives most of all, bring home to all Catholics that the Kingdom of God is not something that came ready-made upon earth. It is something that must be made each day. Indeed, it must be made in each one of our lives, and it is an up-and-down process, as you and I know. To have the mind of Christ means to think of all things as Christ would think of them. To have the heart of Christ is to have the kind of compassion and human understanding for all human problems that Christ Himself would have.

And I think some Catholics - unless this word gets through somehow to them and unless they can plead crass ignorance of the subject matter and of the demands of their Catholic life - some of them are going to be in for a terrible surprise. Some of them, when they get to the pearly gates someday may ask in the greatest surprise, "Well, why is this happening to me?"

I think Our Lord is going to say, "I was hungry and you didn't give Me to eat, and I was thirsty and you didn't give Me to drink, and I was naked and you didn't clothe Me, and I was in prison and you didn't visit Me."

And they are going to say, "Lord, we never saw you during life. How did we not do these things for you?"

"He is going to say, "Whenever you refused to do it for one of these, My least brethren, you did it to Me. You refused to help me."

We have to let our minds run a bit on these standards that I didn't make up this morning - I merely quote from Christ Our Lord, Whose Kingdom we celebrate today. It is Christ Our Lord who tells us this in a way that should get home to all of us - that there are all kinds of people in America, not just Negroes. There are people of all races and of all creeds in America who are literally hungry for a little recognition, for a little opportunity, for a little respect for what they are as human beings, for a chance to better themselves, for a little affection even.

They literally hunger for this. And each one of us must some day stand before God and answer not just for the personal, individual morality that our lives represent, but for the social morality from which we cannot extricate ourselves unless we want somehow to leave the human race.

We have to admit that there are people in the world who really thirst, who thirst for justice, who are being persecuted, who thirst again for the kind of life that is the legitimate longing of every human being, to make something of one's life, to make some contribution to society, to be loved and respected, and not just to be someone who is kicked around from this little place to that. What do we do to give something to drink to those who thirst in this way, whose lives somehow touch our own lives? I think we can easily think of the people who, in this country today and throughout the world, are naked. Not just naked physically, but naked of the kinds of supports and buttresses that should be around any human being - who is of a spiritual nature and who is going to have an eternal destiny,

a human being that God thought enough of that He became a human being in Christ Our Lord at Christmas and that He lived and died for and told how to live and die. He gives us Himself, His own Divine Life in Baptism and gives us Himself as our food along the way.

What do we do to clothe people who are naked as to their civil rights and as to their merely human longings. People who are naked of any kind of respect or any kind of normal protection of freedom? People who can't even live in a decent place if they want to, because they're just excluded, because of some irrelevant factor, having nothing to do with their worth as a human being? People who can't work at a certain job, because it just isn't done and no one has enough nerve to go against the stream and say, "If you're as good as the next person, you can work here." People who can't even go to this or that school, because it just isn't done? People who perhaps cannot even deal with their own family, their own children, to give them the kinds of hopes, the kinds of dreams that every parent wants to give his children.

There are people, naked in this way in our country, in our neighborhoods, today, in our city, here in Chicago. As to people in prison, the same analogy holds true. There are people indeed in prison today as to the expansiveness of their human nature, and to the dignity of their human personality, as to the kind of respect they lack for what God has done for them in making them human beings and what He has done in addition in calling them to be Christians.

Now can a person say he's a Christian and, apriori a Catholic, and still have attitudes that run completely counter to what I have been saying? The fact that I am saying it doesn't mean very much - I am just

another priest out of some 45 or 50 thousand priests in this country, several hundred thousands perhaps in the world. But I think that my case, as I have given it, is based upon the mind of Christ and on the words of Christ. And I know that my case, as I've given it to you dogmatically, is founded upon the Catholic faith. There is one strange thing about the Catholic religion: No one has to belong to it. But if you want to belong to it, you've got to accept it at face value. You can't pick "a, b, c, d" and leave off "e, f, g." If you take the Catholic faith, you either take all of it or you take none of it. You can't pick and choose because, as it stands, it is founded upon the word of Christ Our Lord. And Our Lord said some things that were very pleasant. And He said some things that were quite unpleasant, like eternal fire. But you can't pick the one and discard the other. No Catholic can. And I'm afraid that perhaps the Catholic Church scandalizes our day and age in some of its own membership - that somehow in their own lives they tend to pick some parts of Catholicism and reject others.

I'm willing to admit that we're all creatures of our families, of our neighborhoods, and the kinds of standards we grew up with. But I think we come face to face on a great feast day, like the feast day of Christ the King, asking ourselves honestly: What is the mind of Christ in this or that great issue?

I can quote the President of the United States as saying that the issue of civil rights is our greatest present domestic issue, upon the resolution of this issue depends, in large measure, the world leadership of the United States in a world that is at least two-thirds colored. If we are going to be consistent in our world leadership, there must be a consistency about what we do at home. And no person can absolve himself from some

responsibility in this most pressing of all problems at home. Beyond that, no Catholic worthy of the name can act one way and still claim to be a Catholic. Of course, any Catholic is free to stop being a Catholic when he wants to.

But if you want the promises of Christ and if you want the kingdom of heaven, and if you want all those wonderful things that will happen if you follow the beatitudes, well, then I think you've got to take the other side of the loaf, too. We have to take the kinds of responsibilities and the kinds of vision of the mind of Christ and the heart of Christ as it comes to us in the Gospels.

I don't think anybody in this room, and least of all myself, wants to say that any one of us perfectly represent the mind of Christ. There are too many patches and tatters on all of our lives. But if the mind of Christ is clear on one thing, I think it is clear on the fact that we have one God for our Father and Christ Our Lord for our Brother. That we have one destiny, that we share the same means, that our salvation is not for this or that group, but for all of us, and that we, as Catholics, must be interested in everybody, not just other Catholics, but all people of all races. And that in doing this we must somehow represent the understanding, the compassion, the mind of Christ.

I hope that, having been together at Holy Communion this morning, having received the same Lord into your hearts, having participated in the same sacrifice of Calvary, renewed at the Altar, I would hope that underneath all your efforts in this organization and underneath all the so-called companionship that takes place around these tables, somehow inside your life something very real takes place, that isn't seen today and that is not manifest

to anybody except yourself - that somehow inside your life you try, no matter what it costs, to have the mind of Christ and to have, not just the willingness to sit at a table with each other, but somehow to respect each other and, indeed, to love Christ in each other, because in this you shall be known as Catholics and Christians and disciples of Christ - that we love one another as He has loved us.