

(Sermon delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, Sunday, January 28, 1973)

I greet fellow priests and all of you members of the Notre Dame family who are here together to offer this holy sacrifice of the Mass with us, and to share what I hope will be a Christian reflection on our times. I suppose the first thing someone might ask coming into the hall today is, "Why are we here?" When one thinks of the Mass, one thinks of a celebration. It has been said so many times in recent days there is really nothing to celebrate today; there is no real victory for anyone; there is no certain peace for anyone. The least that we can grasp and be happy about and thank God for is that for now the guns are silent for the first lasting period in ten years in our history and 30 years in the history of the Vietnamese.

I think I would tell some stranger who walked in here that we are here to pray and to try to understand, where we are, what has happened, where we are going, and what has to happen if we are to get there. There is no lack of object for our prayer today. I think that we must pray wholeheartedly for the dead that they may rest in peace. And when I say all the dead, I don't mean just our American dead, but the Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and the simple people who have been killed not in the tens of thousands, but in the millions -- not just soldiers, but civilians -- not just men, but women and helpless children, for all of them may we pray and may we pray for those whom their deaths have grieved so deeply and so humanly.

Let us pray for all who suffer and who will carry the physical and moral marks of this war in their bodies and souls for

the rest of the days of their lives as spiritual or moral or physical cripples. Let us pray for all the dispossessed, all the imprisoned, all those who have alienated themselves from their times and their country. Let us pray for all those whose lives have been in any way poisoned by this war, including those who have profited from it. And let us pray most fundamentally for healing for our people, our times, and our world.

And then let us try to understand first of all what has happened. It's not a very lovable story, but we have to face it this day if we are going to really understand what happened. You all know the vital statistics. They are gruesome and yet they are hard to understand because of their numbers and magnitude. You know that the equivalent of a full Notre Dame football stadium of 50,000 young men had their lives cut off at a time when they were just really beginning to live. You know that another half a million young Americans will bear the scars of this war on their bodies. You know of the \$130 billion that has been spent simply to devastate people and this beautiful earth when it might have done so many other fruitful things so desperately needed by suffering mankind. You know the millions of Vietnamese -- North and South -- and their neighbors -- Laotians and Cambodians -- who have been killed and maimed and wounded.

And anyone who has read any books or watched any television knows of that country which is physically, morally, and spiritually devastated. Filled with the human detritus of war, of graves and orphans and widows, and cripples and illegitimate children and

prostitutes and pimps and thieves and ghettos and slums where once there was beautiful countryside and the jade green of growing rice. I can only recall what a young Vietnamese girl told me once in the airport at Saigon - C'est triste - "it's sad" - and even today, with peace hopefully beginning, the total picture of that country is sad and we bear the largest or at least the equal responsibility of making it as sad as it is.

I am not here today to pass blame or to recriminate, but to try with you to understand what has happened, not just there, which is to our shame, but here in our own country. And while one cannot recall all that has happened in this ten years of time in the few moments available to me, let me just touch on a few of the points that come home most strongly. I think that never before since the Civil War has our country been so frustrated, so divided, so disunited. There has been the cleavage of the young and the old, the cleavage between those who saw the war as an obscenity and those of the military industrial establishment and the government who prosecuted the war, with enthusiasm at times. There has perhaps never before in our history been such a cleavage between the military and the civilian, at times for the wrong reason, but there it was nonetheless.

There has never been a time when the most sensitive people in our society, those morally sensitive to values as to what is right, have been more alienated to their own country, many to the point of leaving it. The war also brought a new kind of unthinking violence to our country, even a threat to the rationality and civility that

should characterize universities. And this whole counter-culture that has developed has somehow brought on a new facism which I think is perhaps the worst threat to all that America stands for; its freedom and dignity and its values.

There has also been that great devaluation of the quality of American life. I have often spoken of it as anomie, a rootlessness, a valueness. It is best seen in the violence and the killing that the war symbolizes and reflects throughout our nation. It is symbolized in the kind of debasement of language where killed human beings are spoken of as body counts in each evening's news, so many hundreds, so many thousands, until we simply couldn't cope with the thought of that many human beings violently killed that day.

We have the debasement of language and the debasement of every value known to man when well-meaning people said that we had to destroy the village to liberate it. We had to destroy somehow everything that human beings built there, small and humble though they may have been. And we had then to destroy the human beings themselves, but now they are free, whatever that might mean in such a context. We had to listen to the Commanding Officer at My Lai say, "I didn't look upon them as human beings, they were just Communists and I have been taught to kill them and kill them I did". Whether they were women or children or men or even soldiers, they were killed.

We have, I think, as a nation been so shocked into a kind of moral insensitivity so that it is difficult today to get people excited about anything, no matter how evil. I would say, by parenthesis,

that we could have never come as far, as quickly as we have, in the whole field of abortion today had it not been the cheapening of sense of the sacredness and the dignity and the value of every human being, no matter how helpless or how incipient.

I think, too, we have seen the moral debasement of many good people who for their moral sensitivity and courage have been put in jail or made to be pariahs in the society of our times. We have driven many young people to drugs, not that one forgives it, but is sad to see them doing it somehow to forget the nightmare, to create a false world in which one might live with some happiness, apart from the world that was being created with such unhappiness. We have seen people that the society needs, people of courage, people of conviction, people of moral sense driven from any participation in its work because somehow they were disloyal to this mammoth Juggernaut that had to ride roughshod over lives and people far away.

It isn't a very pretty story and I must say that we in this community at Notre Dame, as part of the total university community, have become the largest pariahs of all as regards our government today. Many of the most talented, dedicated, sensitive people I know in this university community could not get a job as dogcatcher in Washington today, because they have had courage and because they have said what they thought should be said about the times and the debasement of the quality of American life, and our lack of sensitivity to those great human values that make this country unique among the world of nations.

It was said of a Mexican poet named Paz, a Spanish word meaning peace, that he could so stand back and look at the world in his poetry, that he could visualize the past without love and yet not look at the future with any panic. I would like to say today that having taken this brief look at the past, I think that you and I and all of us must look to the future without panic; we must certainly look at it with love and I think we should also look at the future with hope and courage and dedication. If we've learned anything in the years that have passed, the sad decade that we are just completing, I would hope that you students should have learned the foolishness of war.

Those in my generation were born in World War I, we grew up in World War II. We lived through Korea, as well as this past decade of Vietnam. I think any of us who think at all would have to say that violence is the solution to no human problem, be it personal, national, or global. All that violence brings is death and destruction and ruined lives. If one could say anything with enthusiasm today, looking back on this past decade, one should echo the words of Paul VI which I heard him announce at the United Nations in New York, "jamais la guerre" -- enough of war -- war no more.

The second lesson I think we have to admit today is that the only victory possible to us, and I would repeat the only victory with honor, is what we do to make this peace that stretches out with great fragility ahead of us. And I do not think that peace is possible in our times unless all of us become more concerned about justice,

about the fact that mankind is one wherever he is and in whatever condition, and that the welfare of the world is closely linked to our own welfare as people and as a nation. I think it is difficult to describe peace, but it certainly cannot be described as simply as the absence of people firing guns and cannons at each other or dropping bombs on each other.

I think one must say if one looks at the world today, that peace is not possible, except insofar as we are working for justice. The creation of peace means making hope possible for people who have little enough hope in life, working for human development here and elsewhere throughout the world.

Somehow I think we find it more difficult to see virtue up close than we do from afar. To try to shrink the world for you, I take you to the moon and I ask you to look at that beautiful small globe of blue, white, and green whirling in the darkness of space. And I ask you to think of it as a spaceship with not  $3\frac{1}{2}$  billion people aboard, but with only 5 people aboard, as one can think of 5 people while it is difficult to think of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  billion people. And on that spaceship there are just so many resources, just so many possibilities of hope for <sup>health</sup> help, education, and welfare of all kinds. And on that spaceship there are limited resources, there is just so much of everything and no more. And what there is cannot be replaced, and what is used or wasted or destroyed or perverted cannot be brought back again.

On that spaceship today one of those passengers -- one of the five -- represents all of us in the Western World, the world of

Europe and America. And that one who represents us has 80% of all of the resources of that spaceship at his disposal and the other 4 persons have to divide up the other 20%, having thus 5% apiece. That is all they have and they live in this cramped and shrinking world of a spaceship seeing us with a lion's share -- 80% -- and with the four of them only have 20% to share among themselves. And their 20% is shrinking right now to 10% and the other 10% is coming to us who already have 80%.

I ask you what chance is there for peace or understanding or love or justice aboard such a spaceship? That indeed, my friends, is the picture of the earth today. And if you want to bring it closer to home, of the one person representing 20% of mankind, we as a nation represent 6% of mankind. And we alone as a nation are using 40% of all the world's resources for our own purposes -- selfish or not, luxurious or not. And I say to you that that is not justice and that it cannot continue if there is to be justice in this world. I ask you this day if you want peace? What are you willing to sacrifice for peace? Because sacrifice indeed we must if justice is going to come to the rest of the world.

It is easy to speak of peace and justice far away in Vietnam, but think of it at home because that is where it must begin in your heart and mine - think of peace in families, think of peace in neighborhoods and in schools, think of peace between races -- blacks and whites -- browns and whites -- think of peace between ethnics for, in a peaceful world, one ethnic group cannot



set itself up against another and ask "What am I getting?" And if you who are young today and have a chance to re-make this world want to be one thing, I say to you to be a mediator to somehow begin to bring the process of bridge building to be a reality among the young and the old, between men and women, between the rich and the poor, between those who never had it so good and those who are suffering injustice, between those who don't have to worry about human dignity and those who are affronted in their human dignity every day of their lives, between those who have hope and those who are without hope.

I would have to say to most of you in this hall today that you are on the best side of every one of these equations because you have hope and you have means and you have education and you have what peace you can take to yourself and you have justice, but the world will have greater peace and justice only to the extent that you are willing to take what you have and pass it along and to work for the achievement of justice and peace in our times. You will be a peacemaker, only to the extent that you bridge the polarities that separate so many people in our society. And only to that extent will you enjoy what St. James mentioned in the Epistle today as the "harvest of peace".

We have some problems still facing us. The main problem I have been speaking about is the problem of uniting and re-uniting and healing all in America. The enormous problem of renewing our values, not our values in the macro sense that we are against poverty in the world, but will do nothing about giving up something to help

those who are poor; not the macro values like condemning justice in the military industrial establishment that is making profit out of the war, but not condoning the fellow who is being unjust in a chemistry exam because he happens to be one of us and maybe we are unjust, too. Not just talking about peace far away and then fighting with your roommate -- peace and justice have to be micro values -- virtues that touch you and your life, as well as virtues that are practiced afar and in the field.

I think the greatest reality I can wish for you is that you be concerned for meaning in your lives, for a life so lived that when you get to be the age of your mother and father you can say, "I tried to make a better world". Not condemning us who are older today, but taking a task upon yourself and trying to have us work with you, as indeed we must to achieve a better world. I think that one also would say that one of the unfinished parts of the business that faces us today is to somehow strain ourselves a little to bring back into the fullness of this society in which we live in America those who have been totally alienated from it, simply because they could not accept its values in the time of war. I think of all those who are in prison today because they stood up and said, "I will not serve in such an immoral conflict". I think of some 70,000, more than the number killed in Vietnam, who went to places like Canada or Sweden and who said, "I can't live in this country if it means I will have to take part in something I don't believe in". I think of those who have suffered all kinds of indignities, all kinds of name-calling

because they have played the part of the prophet and told us what we should hear and didn't want to hear. And I think of the great moral value it has been to this country that so many young people have put their lives on the line so to speak, who went to jail or went abroad simply because they wanted to show that they really believe <sup>something so</sup> deeply ~~in~~ ~~a way~~ that they would put their life on the line for it.

I think the country should cherish people like this -- I don't think every case is the same and every case must be evaluated separately -- but I think there is so much good will and so much virtue in all of this that it deserves a little effort on our part to see that many of these people are brought back into the fullness of our society.

I would like to say in conclusion that there is only one real answer for all of you who have many years of life ahead of you, and that is that as you educate yourself for competence in whatever you want to do in life, you also try to educate yourself in value because that is something you must do for yourself. It can't be done for you. And when you educate yourself for value, ask yourself how much your competence is going to be used just for yourself and how much for this creation of a better world. And ask yourself as you develop competence how much of it are you willing to dedicate to create a world that might live in peace and not in war, that might create hope instead of devastation for human beings who are already badly devastated. Ask yourself how much your generation is willing

to give to restore Indo-China to some kind of human hope now that so much money and so many lives have been given to disrupt and destroy it.

I suspect that this will be swimming up stream all the way because, curiously, it is easy to get money for destruction and it's difficult to get money to develop mankind in this world. But this is your challenge and it begins today. I would say that it is easy to criticize the world that our generation has made. It is easy to criticize it as useless and hopeless and, like the poet named Paz, you cannot really look on this world with great love -- the world of the past decade. But neither need you look at the world ahead with panic and neither need you look ahead with anything but courage and hope and dedication and love. And if you do that, then indeed we will have something to celebrate here today.

God bless you all.